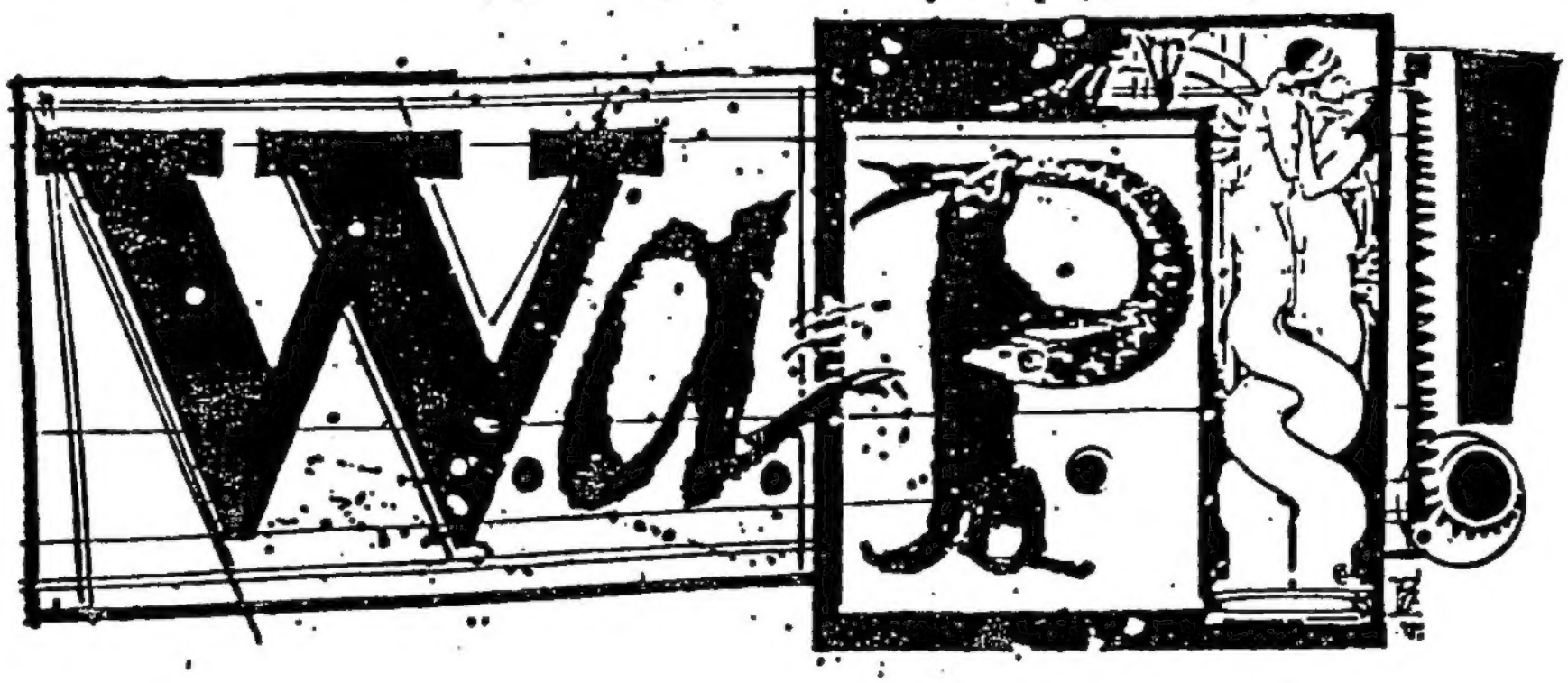
No. 6 September-October 1988



Dave Sim:

Self-Publishing & You

There's only one person who can do it...

I was endlessly relieved when I read the "next issue" section in *WAP!* #4 and found I was being asked merely to outline the "nuts and bolts" of self-publishing in this article. That should be possible in a few paragraphs, and leaves plenty of room for a few observations of a slightly more philosophical nature later on.

Let's start with the assumption that what you have in your hands is a surefire brilliant twenty-four page story launching a series you intend to publish and wish to sell to the Indirect Sales market.

1) Get reduced (8 1/2 x 11) copies of the work, color photocopies of your cover (if it's a painting or otherwise rendered in color) or a black-and-white photocopy (if it's going to be separated using screens and overlays).

2) Send a copy of the mocked-up comic book to each of the Indirect Sales Distributors, along with cover price, discount structure, terms (net 30 days is usual), and format. (Included under "format" would be publishing frequency, series length -- open or closed. *Cerebus* as an example would be a 300-issue limited series, black-and-white with color covers, monthly, 24 pages. When giving the page count, only include the number of interior pages. With web offset printing, page count is in multiples of 16 -- 16 pages, 32 pages, 48 pages. Yes, I know, *Cerebus* is 24 pages, but that's because I'm weird.) The list of distributors is included around here somewhere.

Your discount structure is largely a guessing game that is of critical importance to your success. Bear in mind that most sales to Distributors are at 55% to 65% off the cover price, depending on the quantity ordered. For the minimum discount you have to set a minimum quantity: 500, 1,000, 5,000. The higher the minimum, the fewer distributors you will have who can afford to carry your book. Then you have to decide how many they have to take to get the next largest discount. By way of illustration, we have offered a 70% discount on *Cerebus* for orders over 2,000 copies for about eight years now, and it has not increased sales much at all. *Elfquest*, on the other hand, had a very high minimum order on their book, I believe 5,000, but I might be remembering incorrectly; and until the Turtles came along, theirs was the most successful black-and-white comic book. There is a widespread practice of offering an additional 3% discount to anyone paying for their books in 15 days or less, which I suppose can help your cash flow. I didn't jump on the bandwagon, but it has a lot of support from other publishers. If someone out there is going to experiment, a likely possibility -- it occurs to me -- is offering a 75% or 80% discount and compensating for it with a higher cover price. In the range of $3.00 and $3.50 a copy, as opposed to the current norm of $2.00 and $2.50. It would be difficult to sell to the distributors for any discount of less than 55%, since they sell to their accounts for 40% or 45% off. At a 50% discount, say, they're not making

continued on next page

enough to bother with you.

Phone to let the Distributors know you are sending the package. Phone to make sure they got it. Phone to ask if they intend to carry the book. Phone to ask when it's going in the catalogue they send to all their accounts. Phone to ask when they'll have their first orders. Phone for the final orders. Tally up the orders.

Actually, before that:

2) Hire someone to do your phoning for you, one or maybe two days a week at first. Also to type the cover letters for the distributors and get the photocopying done, mail the stuff out, etc., etc. If you can get someone to donate the time at first, with the promise of a part-time and ultimately full-time position, it is well worth their while. They will have nearly complete autonomy in the day-to-day running of a small creator-owned business. To someone who has served in the mondo blando world of secretarial pools, such a job can be a real breath of fresh air. Remember, it is secretarial skills that are needed here (bookkeeping, basic accounting, taking dictation, typing letters, printer liaison, lawyer liaison, accountant liaison, as in "Karen, phone the accountant and ask him...") Don't let *anyone* talk you into making them your business partner. It'll end up that they need a secretary who does all of their work for them anyway. You the creator making the decisions and a secretary with executive responsibilities (and salary) carrying out those decisions is all you need.

3) Get a quote from a printer on how much he would charge to print your book. If you want it comic book size, show him a *Cerebus*. Magazine-size, show him an *Elfquest*. Ask for quotes on 5,000, 10,000, 15,000. You can ask him for a quote on more than that, but with the market the way it is, you'll be dreaming with your eyes open. In 1980, Deni sent out the specs on *Cerebus* and a sample copy to every web-offset printer from Windsor to Kingston – about seventy-five in all. We got five responses by mail. Preney Print and Litho sent a representative up to discuss it. *That's* how you find a great printer. Remember -- if you were picking an artist to *draw* a comic book, you wouldn't just look at the first two portfolios to walk in the door -- be just as choosy about your printer.

4) Have your printer arrange shipping to the various drop-ship points (*Cerebus* shipping list enclosed). Preney has boxes specially made to hold 250 copies of *Cerebus*, so that is the minimum we ship to each drop-ship point. They can ship less than that by cutting a box down to a smaller size, but we don't guarantee that those arrive undamaged, as we do with the full-size boxes. Make sure your printer knows "mint" means "mint."

5) Make sure you send information on your new title at least five months before you go to press. The distributors solicit three months ahead -- i.e., the books shipping in December are on their September order form. If you tell the distributors in July that you are shipping a book in September, there is no way they can get orders by then, and will probably pass on it completely or order the absolute least number they think they can sell. By approaching them five months ahead of time, you leave a month and a half or so for their Purchasing Department to have a look at your photocopies and discuss carrying your book.

6) Register the name of your publishing company as a small business in your town. Open a bank account in that name. Have all payments for books paid by check to the company name.

That is the "nuts and bolts."

Shortly after I wrote my "Declaration of Independence" for *The Comics Journal* (or "THAT FANZINE" if you're a WAP! Weader) alluding to the ease with which one can self-publish, there emerged a wave of self-publishers (the fact that I was *not* blamed for the black-and-white glut and *TMNT* creators Kevin and Peter *were* was to me a welcome mercy -- though glut guilt remains), and for One Brief Shining Moment creativity stood unchained, and every kid could grow up to be President of His Own Publishing Company. And for a few magical weeks, a kid didn't even need to grow up.

A good friend of mine, Dan Vado of Slave Labor was one of the few who hit that magical window of opportunity and sold, I believe, 70,000 copies of the first issue of *Samurai Penguin*. That was the last summer that I attended the San Diego Con -- 1986, I think. As I recall Dan telling me, Gerhard and I were the only two people who were happy for him. Everyone else was angry, disgusted, bitter, jealous, and what-have-you. As I told everyone who kept asking me how I felt now that the new black-and-whites were outselling *Cerebus on average* by a 3 to 1 margin, "I think it's great. At least the money is going to creators instead of businessmen and bureaucrats."

I still feel that way.

There was not that much money available in the Direct Sales market (I mean, to maintain every new black-and-white at a 60,000 circulation). As orders dropped to follow declining interest, and as hundreds of comics started chasing too few fan dollars, a kind of inflationary spiral kicked in. With more copies of #1 issues than of each succeeding issue, the collector/investor barometer was bitched. You couldn't give away a #1 that was selling 50,000 fewer copies at #2, 55,000 fewer copies at #3. Collector/investors judge a comic book by the value of its first issue; in this case nil. Everyone dumped black-and-white faster than they got into them and self-publishers (like my friend Dan) found themselves clawing to stay alive in a market that had shown every indication of making them wealthy in a very short time and was now starving them.

On the other hand, my girlfriend Zolastraya and her partner Terry Echterling began *Zolastraya and the Band* after the bottom had fallen out of the market.

It's hard to say which would be worse -- starting at 60,000 or 70,000 copies and seeing your circulation drop to the low single-digit thousands, and lower, or starting down there. For one reason or another *Cerebus* had a long, slow climb to its present circulation of thirty-some-odd thousand -- two steps forward, one step back for ten years, starting at a circulation of 2,000 copies for the first year, 6,000 copies for the next year, 8,000 the next year, 8,000 the year after that (the year *Cerebus* went monthly from bi-monthly), 8,000 the year after that (because we went with exclusive distribution by Sea Gate Distributors, and once they "owned" us they did nothing to promote us), 8,500 the year after that (because we went non-exclusive again. Seagate dropped us, so sales to

© 1988 Dave Sim

them went down by 8,000, but everyone else picked us up, and they took 8,500 all totaled). At this point we are talking about issue #25. Each issue brought in enough money to pay the printing bill on the next one with about four hundred dollars profit a month.

Why did I keep going?

Before that time I had been doing comic pages for ten to fifteen dollars each. Pencilled, inked, lettered -- the whole bit. I was working on comic stories I didn't want to do and drawing pictures I didn't want to draw. Doing the cover, paste-up, color seps and letters page for free, I was making twenty dollars a page, and I could do what I wanted to do. That way, if someone liked it I could take credit. (Of course, if someone *didn't* like it, I couldn't blame the script or the inking or the editing; that is a luxury most freelancers have over self-publishers -- built-in scapegoats.)

The critical element was that I kept going.

If you keep going, the market forces of the fan/collector/ investor triad will always work in your favor.

This is the central element of the success of *Cerebus* and the one that is the least understood by the creative community, which is in the best position to profit from the experiment's success.

The critical element was that I kept going.

If you keep going, the market forces of the fan/ collector/investor triad will always work in your favor.

This is the central element of the success of Cerebus, and the one that is the least understood by the creative community.

Let's return to Dan Vado's situation.

Dan is at the point where he can look at his sales chart and jump out of a window if he's looking at *Samurai Penguin* from a traditional business standpoint: first issue, 65,000; second issue, 20,000 (I'm making these numbers up, but it's just to give you an idea); third issue, 9,000; fourth issue 4,000; fifth issue, 2,000.

Pretty hopeless, right?

If you're looking at Shea Stadium and each issue as a concert the situation looks grim. But reduce the mental environment from Shea Stadium to Dan's apartment (or house or whatever). You cannot fit 2,000 people into your house. Or 1500. Or 900.

Zolastraya and the Band has a circulation of about 900 copies. Nine hundred people is a lot of people. If their comic book was a restaurant with nine hundred people in it, you would call that a successful restaurant.

Both Slave Labor and Twilight Twins are faced with the same choice every day: quit or keep going.

My opinion and the point I've tried to make (so many times that this is very probably the last time I will try to make it) is that they *should* keep going.

There is no question that they could make more money at this point working behind the counter at Burger King. It is very possible that they might have to get part-time jobs, lower their standard of living, eat macaroni for the next six months every night of the week (this is not an exaggeration; Deni and I lived on the stuff for about two years).

But if they stick with it, some day there will be a *Samurai Penguin* #81, a *Zolastraya and the Band* #94, and at that point they will be rewarded handsomely for their efforts, their future (as much as the future can be) will be secure and they will be sole and exclusive owners of something that generates revenue cumulatively. The more work they do, the more work they own, and the more work they have to sell to their audiences day after day, month after month, year after year.

If they are wise, they will have a certain number of copies of their books in pristine mint condition (I keep twenty of each) saved for the day when their circulation of 900 or two thousand or whatever will mean the books are Rare and Valuable -- not a failure or an embarrassment.

But what has this got to do with you, the comic book freelancer? Turning out pages for a comfortable page rate; making a home at DC and Marvel. Well, look at it this way:

1) You're happy doing what you're doing. After working for forty years, you'll have nothing, and no one will hire you because you're old-fashioned. You have no pension and you die broke. More power to you. Enjoy.

2) You think you're going to make a home at DC and Marvel and then self-publish and do what you want. No one has ever done this successfully, and those who try usually end up going back to DC and Marvel and doing second-rate books for the rest of their lives as punishment for being Bad Children. You end up with no pension or work, and you, too, die broke.

3) You have just started working at DC and Marvel. It is not what you want to do, and you want to self-publish, but you don't want to take the risk.

To my mind, #3 is the only one who has a chance. #2 has a possibility but it involves being brilliant enough to come up with intriguing new ideas that have nothing to do with DC and Marvel-type stories.

I think Alan Moore, Frank Miller, Bill Sienkiewicz are in the category of being able to do this. Maybe a handful of others. Most people who have worked for Marvel or DC for longer than a year or two are adept at producing Marvel and DC stories and would probably need at least two or three years of self-deprogramming before they were ready for self-publishing. No one wants to buy a Marvel or DC comic in black and white when they can get the real thing in color for half the

money.

It is to category #3 that I address myself at this point.

There is no future where you are. If you are twenty-five years old, you will be working for the next forty years. At something. Or, more likely, many somethings. But you will be working, and most of your jobs will be difficult. If you choose to draw comic books, you have chosen the most difficult job of all. The energy, time, and application required to become good enough to produce a commercially salable piece of comic art is mind-boggling. No medium -- not ballet, not illustration, not oil-painting -- requires such a ridiculously high level of high-speed expertise. "I want it good AND I want it Tuesday" usually means, "I want it brilliant AND I want it Tuesday when the office opens." And if you won't invest the blood, sweat, and tears, there are a thousand others who'll take your place the minute you stop picking DC and Marvel cotton.

The minute you slow down.

The minute you stop picking faster than everyone else.

Because you've been doing it forty years.

And you're just plain worn out.

They'll send flowers to your funeral, but you better have it in your contract and a good lawyer to make them live up to it.

In self-publishing, as I've outlined, there will undoubtedly be times when you will come very close to starving to death. You will never have extra money. You will have to move somewhere where living is cheap (free is even better if you can manage it), and all that you will be able to do is draw comic books. And for eight or ten years this will go on. You won't start doing as well financially as your peers for probably five years -- maybe as long as seven years. Then you'll overtake them and pass them like they were standing still.

If you're like me, you'll start living like a drunken rock star who's been told he has six months to live. You'll do that for a while, and then you'll go back to just writing and drawing your book, because it really is the thing you love doing the most. You'll binge once in a while (three months in Hawaii, Presidential Suite at the Waldorf), but the true meaning of your success will outweigh everything else. The fervent wish, "If I could just write and draw all day and not have to go to bed at a certain time, or do what I'm told, or listen to someone I think is a total jerk" will have come true and it really will be all that you need.

Even if you become the new hot star at DC or Marvel you will spend your life living from advance payment to advance payment -- down to your last five hundred bucks with twenty pages to go in the graphic novel. What to do? Sign another contract for another advance; another six months of your life. But first you have to finish the twenty pages so make it seven months. Spend a little less freely. Make the money last this time. Finish that graphic novel, that mini-series. Surprise! The money lasted this time. You've got a grand in the bank and the project is done. What are you going to do now? Retire on a grand? Hell, no. Sign another contract. Let's make it a year-long project this time. Or two. Or three.

And then, miracle of miracles, you have a hit. *Swamp Thing* or *Howard the Duck*. Berni Wrightson was not included in any junket to see the filming of *Swamp Thing*. DC staffers were. Steve Gerber had to buy his T-shirt of *Howard the Duck* from Lucasfilm.

They (comics and film business people) have more respect for their used kleenex. Maybe because when they throw their used kleenex away it doesn't come back.

All you people in category #3, please think about it.

All you people in Categories #1 and #2?

Hey. Sorry.

That's life.

All right. That wasn't very nice at all.

There *are* ways for a Marvel or DC freelancer to do a little self-publishing. Let's say you've just finished *Batman: His Last Case (Not the One Frank Did, A New One Because Frank Told Us To Go Fuck Ourselves And We'll Be Damned If Someone Who Tells Us To Go Fuck Ourselves Is Going To Run Around Saying He Did The Definitive Batman: His Last Case)*.

You've got more than a few bucks because somehow all the shops went nuts and bought this graphic novel and Waldenbooks has reordered five times. So you've got this more-than-a-few bucks and you're feeling in the mood to do something a little cagey. Throw everyone a curve. Try something a little... you know...

Different.

Not "DC Different." The way they spell it with a capital letter, sprinkle it liberally through press releases, across covers, shoehorn it into editorials. The way they could almost trademark the term and put it with the "super-hero" trademark they own jointly with Marvel. The way they could make it next year's try-out book. *Different Super-Heroes*.

No. *Different*.

Like "Master Race" different. Like "Big If" different. Like *The Man* different.

There is no reason that any artist any age could not have come up with "The Man," Vaughn Bode's brilliant one-shot -- technically, I mean. The drawing is not difficult or complicated. The words are few and simple. The package is inexpensive.

Different.

Do something different.

Print a couple thousand.

Take 'em to cons...

Nononono.

Not a carload. Throw a few in the portfolio. Sell 'em at your table. When they're gone, they're gone. You'll probably hear from shops, "YOU SCUMBAG! I OUGHT TO RIP YOUR TONSILS OUT! HOW DARE YOU PUBLISH SOMETHING AND NOT OFFER IT TO MY DISTRIBUTOR!" When they calm down, they might even buy a few. You can leave the first page blank for doing sketches and stuff.

You won't make a fortune out of it.

But you will make money.

And if you do make money, you can do T-shirts. Sell the film rights. Do a sequel. A portfolio. Hand-colored prints. Buttons bags, toys.

Or you can just print some more.

But *you'll* be the one making the decisions.

I think it's about time.

Don't you?

Kevin Eastman & Peter Laird:

The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Success Story

or, The Art of Being in the Right Place at the Right Time

Life is strange. In life there are hopes, dreams, and aspirations, linked by coincidence, chance, and circumstance to inspiration, struggle, and realization. Every so often, for a lucky few, such dreams become reality. Our dream was to write and draw comics -- and to make a living doing it. However, our initial vision of the dream, and its eventual realization, couldn't have been more different.

Back in 1982 we were just two guys whose idea of heaven was to tread the same ground walked before us by such giants as Jack Kirby, Richard Corben, Frank Miller, and Barry Smith. We aspired to labor in the same hallowed halls where the aforementioned creators made their marks. Our initial meeting came about through an odd coincidence, when Kevin, temporarily relocated in Amherst, Massachusetts from his home state of Maine, was returning home from work and spied on the bus floor a beat-up copy of a newsprint magazine. It was an issue of *Scat*, a locally-produced cartoon rag with which Peter had formerly been associated. When Kevin went to show them his work, the producers of *Scat* gave him the name and address of an artist with a style and tastes similar to his own -- and that is how Kevin Eastman met Peter Laird.

A year later, coincidence struck once more. Peter, following the woman he was later to marry, picked up and moved from Northampton, Massachusetts to Dover, New Hampshire -- a town that was, by chance, a mere twenty minutes away from Ogunquit, Maine, where Kevin was then living and working. This reunion laid the groundwork for the formation of Mirage Studios, that name chosen because, when Kevin eventually moved down to Dover, and we started to seriously work together, there was no real studio -- just the two of us in the living room with our lap boards and pencils.

It was in that "studio" that the event took place which would evolve to shape our lives for the next four and a half years; indeed, continues to direct our destinies. In itself, it was not particularly significant -- a late-night session of silliness, capped by Kevin drawing what he termed a "ninja turtle," followed by Peter's revision, and Kevin's quadrupling, and Peter's addition of "teenage mutant" to the description of the critters -- but it effectively began the process that reversed our attitudes and fortunes and set us on the path to self-publishing.

Looking back, it seems that we were only able to take a real breath during the fall of 1984, in the hiatus between issues one and two, before Kevin moved down to Connecticut to rejoin Peter and take up the task of writing and drawing -- and publishing -- comics full-time. After that, things just exploded. We sometimes wonder how we survived in as intact a condition as we did, and generally attribute it to some kind of innate and basic common sense. Oh, that's not to say we didn't make mistakes -- we made plenty of them! But we have never done anything that has crippled us as creators, or violated ourselves as publishers, or allowed ourselves to be seriously ripped off as owners of a "property."

Well... maybe that's not completely accurate. There was the Solson debacle, and the ongoing First fiasco, and the annoying "Turtlemania" scenario. But, by and large, we have managed to hook up with ethical characters, and make good deals that were fair to all concerned.

There are essentially two parts to the success of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, the first being publishing, and the second merchandising or licensing. The publishing came first, and we did it ourselves...hence, "self-publishing." We did it all, from writing and drawing and lettering to arranging printing and advertising to packing and invoicing to bringing the boxes to UPS and waiting for the checks to come in. It was definitely a "learn as you earn" process, beginning with total naivete and progressing forward through various stages of sophistication.

By the time the orders for the second printing of the second issue started coming in, we had realized what we had: a dream come true, a chance to write and draw whatever we wanted, and to make serious money doing it. The beast lay before us. We grabbed the reins and began to ride. We wrote and drew to please ourselves, and, wonder of wonders!, our readers seemed to dig it.

In our second year of full-time self-publishing, we made an all-out effort to produce as much material as we could without sacrificing what we considered quality, and to do all we could to support that effort. That meant accepting virtually all invitations to shows, doing signings every month, and jumping at any and all opportunity to publicize our books. This effort helped a lot -- sales of the books jumped, and we started to establish a "presence."

As we entered our third year, the strain was starting to show. Our schedule of book production slipped badly, and we started to show signs of premature "burnout." It seemed that there was just so long you could keep up a pace like that before problems arose. Complicating matters were two things: the introduction of new books in the Mirage line by folks such as Michael Dooney and Jim Lawson, and the licensing of the Turtles to outside concerns. In a business such as ours, anything outside of actual drawing and writing is a distraction, taking precious time and energy away from the act of creation. That is one of the downsides of self-publishing, and, conversely, one of the benefits of working for another publisher -- that if your work is published by

someone else, usually all you have to think about is the creative end. As we were to learn, keeping on schedule is extremely important for maintaining reader interest and sales.

The licensing of the Turtles actually began in late 1984, when Dark Horse, a metal miniatures company, expressed interest in doing the turtles as miniature figures. This excited us to no end, and we leaped into it, signing a contract that, in retrospect, should have been submitted to a lawyer before we signed. But we were lucky that the folks at Dark Horse turned out to be honorable sorts. This was followed by several other deals, including a local Connecticut comics fans who did a limited edition series of *TMNT* buttons; a small company in Georgia that did glow-in-the-dark *TMNT* shirts; a comics dealer in Florida who put out a limited edition *TMNT* fanzine called *Turtlemania*; the notorious Solson Comics, which put out a number of *TMNT* "training manuals" and a

LOOK, MA! COMIC BOOKS -- ZAP AN' I DREW 'EM! WE'RE GONNA PRINT 'EM! OURSELVES AND SELL A MILLION OF 'EM!
OH, ISN'T THAT SPECIAL?! JOHN, LOOK WHAT THE BOYS DID!
HUMPH! DREAMERS... WAIT TIL THEY GROW UP AND FIND OUT WHAT LIFE IN THE REAL WORLD IS LIKE! THEY'LL LEARN...
DAILY NEWS
BUSH DUKE
WICKED COOL GUY COMIX
RADD
FLAMING CARROT

"How to draw TMNT's" book before folding up and vanishing into the night owing us a significant amount of money; First Comics, which did color reprints in graphic novel form of the original *TMNT* books; and, last but not least, the deal that was to ultimately lead, through another odd coincidence, to our "big break" -- Palladium Books, which did *TMNT* role-playing games.

That coincidence went something like this:

Among other things, Palladium also had a license to do role-playing games based on the *Robotech* characters. One day, in May of 1986, Kevin Siembieda, head honcho of Palladium, was on the phone with the agent representing Harmony Gold, owners of *Robotech*. The agent, one Mark Freedman, asked about what other properties Palladium was working with. Siembieda rattled them off, and when he came to the Ninja Turtles, Freedman fell off his chair laughing (or so he later told us). In June of that year, Freedman contacted us, and we signed with him as our exclusive agent for licensing two weeks later. It was and is one of the best and most timely decisions we've ever made.

Here again the "being in the right place at the right time" factor kicks in. Mark Freedman was looking for a new project to which he could fully devote his considerable talents and enthusiasm. Playmates Toys, the company that Freedman picked to go after, was a fairly young, hungry company looking to get into the boys' action figure market. At that time, the action figure market was glutted with clones of *Masters of the Universe*, and buyers were crying out for something new and offbeat. *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* fit the bill.

From that point on it was "hurry up and wait" time. It took nearly two years from our first meetings with Playmates until the first toys actually appeared in stores. During that period we learned a number of things about the world of mass market character merchandising, primary among them that in this kind of high excitement situation, it behooves one to keep a level head and not to go crazy spending money that one does not yet have. The potential for big bucks is there, definitely, but it's going to take a while before those bucks come rolling in, and then only if the toys actually sell.

Almost as important was learning the fine art of compromise. In a perfect situation, you will always get your own way, and never have to budge an inch on what you think is best for your property. However, that almost never happens, and you have to tread a fine line between being a hardnose and a creampuff. It was difficult at first, letting go of the characters we had given birth to and nurtured for four years, but once we were certain that we had pointed the folks at Playmates and our other licensees in the right direction, we could do it. What helped too was the fact that while some aspects of our characters would change when translated into toys and such, our own *TMNT* books would remain separate and inviolate.

Contracts are a world unto themselves. There isn't enough space here to cover all their ins and outs, but the main thing is to always try to protect yourself, and one of the best ways to do that is to be specific. For example, if all you want your licensee to have the rights for is reprinting your black-and-white books in color in a graphic novel format, state that explicitly in the contract. Don't just say that they have the right to reprint your books in color, because that's too vague and could be interpreted to mean many different things. Two things that will help you with contracts are common sense and a lawyer. Just remember, though, you can never predict every problem that might come up. The best you can do is try to think of everything and hope for the best. After all, you have to trust people to some degree. It's unavoidable.

When all is said and done, the most important element in all of our dealings has been our ownership of the Turtles. We never sold the Turtles, only leased them temporarily.

But when all is said and done, the most important element in all of our dealings had been our ownership of the Turtles. We have never sold the Turtles, only leased them temporarily. Ownership has given us the freedom to follow Dave Sim's lead and do a massive -- and lucrative -- reprint volume of all of our *TMNT* material, and to continue doing reprints of various types, and new material, and to hire other people to do new material, and so on, whenever we want to. We can also lease the rights to the Turtles to other concerns, for our benefit, as we see fit. If only Jack Kirby had had the same option with just one of his famous creations -- say, the Incredible Hulk.

Kirby is just one example of creators who have given up all or most of the rights to their inspired creations for the sake of survival, but he was not the first and certainly not the last. A contemporary example is Chris Claremont, and to compare his situation to that of another creator, Dave Sim, is enlightening. Both men have been working on the same characters for roughly the same time -- Claremont doing *X-Men* for Marvel Comics, Sim doing *Cerebus* for himself and his own company, Aardvark-Vanaheim. After ten years of working on *X-Men*, if Claremont were to leave, he would take with him whatever money he had made and the memories of the experience. He would not be able to ever do anything with the characters of the X-Men, or any characters that he had actually created for the *X-Men* book, unless Marvel Comics allowed him to, under their terms. Sim, on the other hand, because he owns Cerebus lock, stock, and barrel, can take all that art and story that he's done over the last ten years and make bags of money by reprinting it in fat volumes or facsimile reprints or whatever, in addition to licensing Cerebus out as he sees fit. It's kind of like paying rent on a house for ten years, or making mortgage payments on a house. Which would you prefer?

Creator ownership equals creator equity, and that's the root of the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* success story.

Alan Moore:

A Letter From England

Hello, everybody. Bet you thought I was dead.

When Frank suggested that I write this piece for *WAP!*, my first thought was that it would be nice for my fellow professionals to hear what I sound like when I'm not white-knuckled with moral outrage. My only published utterances over the past eighteen months or so have generally been livid, spittle-flecked things about rights, royalties and ratings, and I wouldn't want anyone to get the impression that breakfast table chatter around Moore Manor never gets more lighthearted than diatribes against the Comics Code delivered through a mouthful of GrapeNuts. On the other hand, since Frank asked for something on self-publishing and since one of the reasons I'm publishing myself now is moral outrage, then I find myself in something of a predicament. Best get the bile out of the way first, perhaps, before progressing to the more positive aspects of the subject at hand.

Briefly, then, I started self-publishing because I felt that I could no longer work for the major comic companies. Ironically, the higher I progressed in the industry, the more of its indignities were made visible by the elevated vantage point. Eventually, unable to plead ignorance any longer, I was forced to choose between remaining within traditional comics and turning a blind eye to their abuses, or getting out and pitching my tent elsewhere along the medium's less frequented byways.

It should be said that the Canadian-dry influence of Mr. David Sim has been of considerable importance here. For years, this frosthardened son of the North has been standing there in his snowshoes, haranguing those of us within the bullpens and sheepdips of mainstream comics from an uncompromised position that's been increasingly difficult to refute. "Hey! Why work for them guys? You must be some kinda stupid hosers, eh?" Persuasive though these arguments were, dripping from that maplesyruped tongue, I still found them resistible. Although I accepted intellectually that much of what Dave said was true and that creators were being cheated, it took a while for me to feel it emotionally. It is, after all, difficult to feel cheated when earning more money than you've made in your life, and when, by dint of sales power, you are being cosseted and pampered by the people who publish your work. It's only when you realize that DC could license a Saturday morning Rorschach cartoon series complete with Blot the Dog and two mod teenybopper sidekicks that you realize how much you don't have. You don't have the dignity of calling your work your own. You don't have total control over how it is presented, no matter how big a celebrity you are. Above all, your creative freedom rests solely upon your ability to turn out commercial success after commercial success. It doesn't matter that your popular team book or smash hit maxi-series were practically supporting the company five years ago. What have you done *lately*? After a while, all these things start to add up.

That said, I still needed circumstances to kick my arse silly before finally taking the plunge. It would have happened sooner or later anyway, but in the event, it was the KY jelly hitting the fan that finally roused me from my torpor. The British government, letting something called Clause 28 become a section and pass into law, began a campaign of mass discrimination against Britain's homosexual community. Less significantly, they propelled me and my partners, Phyllis and Debbie, inexorably towards the world of self-publishing. Lounging around one evening wondering what we could do beyond organizing local resistance to the clause, I suddenly remembered that in my day job, I was a comic creator, with lots of talented comic creator buddies. Progressing logically from this point, *AARGH* was conceived as a way of showing support and solidarity, disseminating information and raising money to oppose this pernicious piece of legislation. The next quantum leap in our thinking came a couple of days later, while in conversation with the aforementioned Mr. Sim. In between mouthfuls of Molsons and interjections of "Publish it yourself, eh?" it was finally agreed that if we stopped acting like hosers and set up our own imprint, Dave would let Aardvark carry the costs until the money started coming in. It felt very much like the Steve Martin routine in 'The Jerk':

"But what do *you* get out of the deal, Dave?"

"Well, when you're rich and famous, send me a postcard."

"Hmmm. So, a postcard, huh?"

I talked it over with Phyllis and Debbie, and, deciding we could always welch on the postcard anyway, we agreed to go along with it. Over the next new weeks we formed Mad Love Publishing, starting off by buying an already existing company for a nominal fee and then changing the name. I didn't know that before! I didn't know that companies were like Cabbage Patch Dolls, and that they just grew them somewhere, on a company farm! Isn't capitalism peculiar and wonderful? Next we had a copyright search performed on the company name, just in case there was a Mad Love Surgical Appliances Inc. anywhere out there. There wasn't. Following this, we had a trademark search carried out to similarly clear the bleeding black heart that Dave had so skillfully provided as a logo. Here, bewilderingly, we ran into problems: Did you know that Gillette owns the heart? As a symbol, that little red set of inverted buttocks on one quarter of all the playing cards you ever saw is the property of Gillette. It doesn't even have to be red. They own all hearts, in perpetuity. "And don't you Heart Research Foundations or valentine manufacturers give us any shit either, or you're liable to wake up smiling through your throat." Fuck 'em. It's a good logo. We're sticking with it. What are they going to do, stop selling me shaving equipment or something?

Anyway, we set up bank accounts and registered for tax. We designed the slick yuppie business cards, the

headed notepaper, the invoices and the compliments slips. We had the buttons printed up and enquired about the T-shirts. Phyllis and Debbie began the nightmarish task of coordinating 72 pages of material by almost as many artists, none of whom were being paid, into a coherent benefit comic. Slowly, amidst all this, it began to dawn upon us that we were now publishers. Actually, I first realized I was a publisher when I suddenly felt the overpowering urge to censor one of Frank Miller's *AARGH* pages. It's incredible! I always thought that those publishers we worked for were just being mean and cowardly about censorship, but it's an uncontrollable involuhtary force that makes them do it, just like Jack Nicholson in *The Shining*. You've only been a publisher for a week when your eyes start rolling around dementedly and you feel the irresistible compulsion to censor Frank Miller. Nobody else. Just him. See, Frank's page had got this giant erection on it. I'm serious about this. There's a memo on our office noticeboard that reads, "Get rid of Frank's penis." We didn't think we could get it through British Customs, and what with this book being so important and everything... I mean, I know I said all that stuff about censorship in *The Buyer's Guide*, but... aah, what the hell. Frank promised that he'd keep quiet about it if I did this piece for *WAP!*, and... Oh shit. Ah well.

As I gradually understood that I was indeed a publisher and not just some guy with a bunch of business cards that I'll keep forever because I never meet anybody I don't know... well, that's when the implications started to filter through. I was a publisher. I could do whatever I liked. If I didn't want my next book to have superheroes in it, then that was okay. If I didn't want it to have any science fiction or fantasy either, then that was okay too. No fist-fights, artificial cliffhangers or adventure story pacing? Fine. Why, if I wanted, I could go right outside genre altogether. I could do a twelve-issue series about shopping and algebra. In fact, I think I will. Beyond content, there was presentation and packaging: No more tedious explanations as to why you want a close-up of a smiley button on your first issue's cover when you could as easily show a fight scene. No more restrictions upon even one's most eccentric ideas. No more fucking house ads. Why, we could do comics exactly the way we thought they should be done! Even if they fell short, we'd know there was nobody to blame but ourselves. The feeling, unsurprisingly, was exhilarating.

Exhilaration aside, however, there was another feeling there too... a feeling of recognition and familiarity that I didn't finally place until a couple of days ago, when I finally realized what all this self-publishing stuff reminded me of: When I was eleven, I was president and publisher of Omega comics. Well, at least, I used to draw them in colored ballpoint, staple them together and loan them out for a penny a time, so I suppose that made me a publisher. We never did that well... which I blame upon the then-current "Colored Ballpoint Implosion"... but on the other hand we never had smartass remarks made about us in the comic attractions section of *Amazing Heroes*, either. At the end of the day we'd made six shillings and fourpence... roughly a dollar at the exchange rate back then. All right, it wasn't *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, but I'm sure you take my point: we were doing what we wanted to do, exactly how we wanted to do it. The thrill of doing that was what lured me to this procession in the first place, hoping to recapture on a viable paying basis some of that charge that I'd felt as a child. At first, mistakenly, I associated that thrill with the simple fact of working in comics. When that didn't quite recapture the original magic, I came to believe that work amidst the nostalgic vineyards of the superhero genre was what I was searching for. Five years and a hundred comic books later I've realized that wasn't it either.

What I was looking for was this: to be a publisher again. After twenty-odd years I'm beginning to understand that I should have stuck with it in the first place. Shit, "The Adventures of the Tombstone Kid" would be up around issue three hundred by now. That'd make Dave Sim and his goddamned aardvark look pretty sick, wouldn't it? Given that half a dozen other people invented steam engines around the same time as James Watt... "steam engine time," as Charles Fort called it... then it shouldn't be surprising that most of the creators I know are at least thinking seriously about self-publishing.

It's in the air. Well beyond the narrow confines of comic books, the publishing industry approaches upheaval as desktop publishing becomes a reality and the emphasis moves away from large centralized imprints towards small and specialized alternatives. The big companies, though large and powerful, are cumbersome. It takes a long while for the nerve impulses to travel from tailtip to brain, and even when they get there, the brain is miniscule in comparison to the company's body mass.

I'd like to think what we propose here are small, mammalian companies, warm-blooded, quick to respond, breeding like bunnies and eating all the stegosaurus eggs before they're hatched. Y'know, if this were to catch on, who knows what might happen; might already be happening? Perhaps mainstream comics really are moving from the Golden Age to the Silver Age to the Ice Age... and then to the La Brea Tar Pits. Maybe one day there'll be nothing left of them save for a dusty exhibit somewhere in the echoing vastness of the British Museum or the Smithsonian Institute: "We've reconstructed it painstakingly, despite the ravages of time. We're not sure, but we think it's a Work For Hire contract."

It's been nice talking with you again. Look after yourselves, and don't take any wooden merchandise agreements.

Very best,
Alan Moore

P.S. After *AARGH* makes its appearance, hopefully in August, the next piece of work will be the aforementioned algebra-and-shopping epic, a twelve-part series with the gorgeous and talented Bill Sienkiewicz entitled *The Mandelbrot Set*, which should appear early next year. All of this stuff is in black and white. I just don't have that many colored ballpoints.

Larry Hancock and Michael Cherkas:

Co-Publishing

When we were asked to write an article on co-publishing, we first had to ask ourselves, just how do you define "co-publishing?" Under what conditions is the creator "sharing" in the publication of his work? Does it depend upon the manner in which the amount of his payment is determined? Or does the amount (or lack) of editorial direction (or interference) from the publisher define the term? Or is the relationship defined by the amount of time and effort that the creator must put forward in endeavors which would normally be the province of the publisher?

We decided that all of the above must be taken into account, and we'll look at each in turn, sprinkled with several illustrations from our own experiences with Renegade Press, as we discuss this topic.

First, we should say a few words about ourselves and where our comments are coming from. For the past three years we have written (Larry), drawn (Michael) and co-plotted (both of us) *The Silent Invasion* and *Suburban Nightmares* for Renegade Press. We have done no other major work in the comics industry for any other publisher. Our comments are therefore drawn primarily from our relationship with Renegade and its publisher, Deni Loubert; a relationship in which we were extensively involved in all of the advertising, promotion, foreign rights, contract writing, etc., etc., regarding these two books.

Larry is a Chartered Accountant, Michael is a graphic designer/illustrator. We are both professionals who work constantly with professionals when we tend to those other jobs. We have expectations of our publisher, and all others with whom we deal with in our comic book affairs, based not on lofty ideals but rather on our very real experiences in those other jobs. Sometimes those expectations are met; often they are not.

Creative Freedom

If there's one thing that can be said in favor of Renegade Press, more than for any other publisher, it's that Deni Loubert let us "do our own thing." Completely. Without interference.

Our agreement with Deni called for us to submit the story pages directly to the printer with photocopies of the covers and finished stories sent to Renegade for her review. No requirement for advance approval of any plots, scripts, artwork -- nothing. Not once did Deni suggest any changes. That is by no means a negative comment, but rather a statement of just how much freedom we had.

Some would consider this the ideal creator/publisher relationship, and we took care not to abuse our rights. But this may not be the best situation for all creators to find themselves in. Some writers/artists may need input from the publisher; not "interference," but rather editorial guidance, another more objective viewpoint.

Some people just naturally wander in their story telling, lose the focus of the story they are trying to tell. They *need* an editor. But in a co-publishing arrangement, the publisher may not be able/willing/capable of fulfilling that function, necessitating the creator to either forgo editorial input (and therefore possibly not realize his project to its full potential) or to have to incur the expense of hiring a freelance editor. Both alternatives will probably cost him money.

Speaking of which...

The Money

The most common arrangements by which publishers pay creators for their work are the per page basis, the royalty basis, or a combination of both. However, in our agreement with Renegade Press, we were paid by a different method, one in which we shared directly in the gross profits generated by the sales of the books. (As in any publishing agreement, separate terms covered money for licensing, foreign rights, etc. Here we are discussing payment for the actual comic book version.)

For each issue, the direct revenue from the distributors was tallied. From that amount, printing costs and a standard amount per issue for advertising were deducted. The remainder, the gross profit, was split on a percentage basis between the publisher and ourselves. From her share, Deni Loubert paid all of her administrative costs.

By this method, we shared directly in the success and failure of our book. No page rates were paid, no advances. When sales were good, we did well. When sales were bad, we bitched and moaned -- but not at the publisher; she was sympathetic and supportive because she suffered just as much.

By entering into our particular co-publishing agreement, we forsook the "guaranteed" income that a page rate might have afforded us, in return for a potentially vaster reward if sales boomed. But if sales were poor, we stood to be paid very little for our efforts, if anything at all; for example, if revenue from distributors was too little to cover printing costs, we would have got no money at all and Renegade would have lost money.

To be perfectly blunt, if you are looking for financial security, co-publishing is not for you. Not unless you *know* you have the hottest property in the world *and* you know that the books are going to get onto the stands in sufficient number *and* the book is well publicized to the right potential buyers.

Creators also need to carefully review the *terms* for payment in any prospective agreement. We were paid forty-five days after the book went on sale. That may seem like a long time to wait, but we did get paid on time (in almost all cases), and we got paid regardless of whether or not the distributors paid Deni. When Glenwood and Sunrise (and who knows who else) didn't pay Renegade, we *still got paid*. The losses were part of Deni's

costs, not ours.

But it's important to make sure the creator's agreement with the publisher covers all such points.

Responsibilities

Now here's the rub. In a co-publishing arrangement, it is most important to understand what responsibilities the publisher and the creator are each going to take upon themselves, and more importantly what tasks each is capable of performing.

From Day One we prepared camera-ready artwork for all but one of our *The Silent Invasion* ads that appeared in the comics trade, wrote all but the first of the press releases, wrote and rewrote foreign rights agreements, dealt far more extensively with the printer than we would have in a standard publisher/creator arrangement, etc., etc.

When entering into any publishing agreement, but especially a co-publishing agreement with a small publisher, it is extremely important to know the skills of the people you are dealing with.

Deni Loubert freely admitted, during the early days of *The Silent Invasion*, that she had no design sense whatsoever. She was more than willing to try to put together ads, and seek the help of friends to aid her, but we realized that we had to take this task upon ourselves in order to get the quality of advertising that we wanted. Ditto with the writing of press releases.

It is also important to know the ability with which the publisher can use those skills, what his *capabilities* are. Your potential publisher may have the best intentions in the world, but be miserable at collecting delinquent accounts from the distributors. If *your* payments depend on his collections, you better watch out! Or your new publisher could be just too swamped with work to follow through on certain of his duties...

Once you understand the other party's abilities and capabilities, you can make decisions, even take risks if you want to, but at least you'll be doing so with your eyes open.

Case in point: As sales on the final issues of *The Silent Invasion* slid, we stopped preparing advertising for the book. As seems to be the case with a lot of promotion, we had no way of determining whether the early ads had helped sales to any degree. The retailers (who are the people you are *really* selling your books to, not the end buyers) seemed to just ignore us, hoping we'd go away so that they could carry a couple more mutant books.

But we were interested in finding out whether an effective advertising campaign for a small independent book could boost its sales. Therefore, when we negotiated our agreement with Renegade for our biweekly *Suburban Nightmares* series, we submitted to Deni a promotion/advertising schedule, prepared in the most minute detail, covering all aspects, right from the initial press release announcing the project, including all ads, previews, promotional articles, etc. All parties agreed to the schedule. All events were detailed as to exact timing, and all had plenty of lead time to arrange.

> **By entering into our particular co-publishing agreement, we forsook the "guaranteed" income that a page rate might have afforded us, in return for a potentially vaster reward if sales boomed. But if sales were poor, we stood to be paid very little for our efforts, if anything at all; for example, if revenue from distributors was too little to cover printing costs, we would have got no money at all and Renegade would have lost money.**

And what happened? All advertisements have appeared at least a month late. The second press release was never sent out. The First Look in *Amazing Heroes* which (we were told by Deni in February) had been arranged for June, finally appeared in the first week of August, a week after the first issue had gone on sale. A flyer mentioning a special offer that expired on June 1 didn't reach retailers until a couple of days beforehand (and may have even been late). Ads scheduled for *Amazing Heroes* issues on sale in May and June didn't appear until late July.

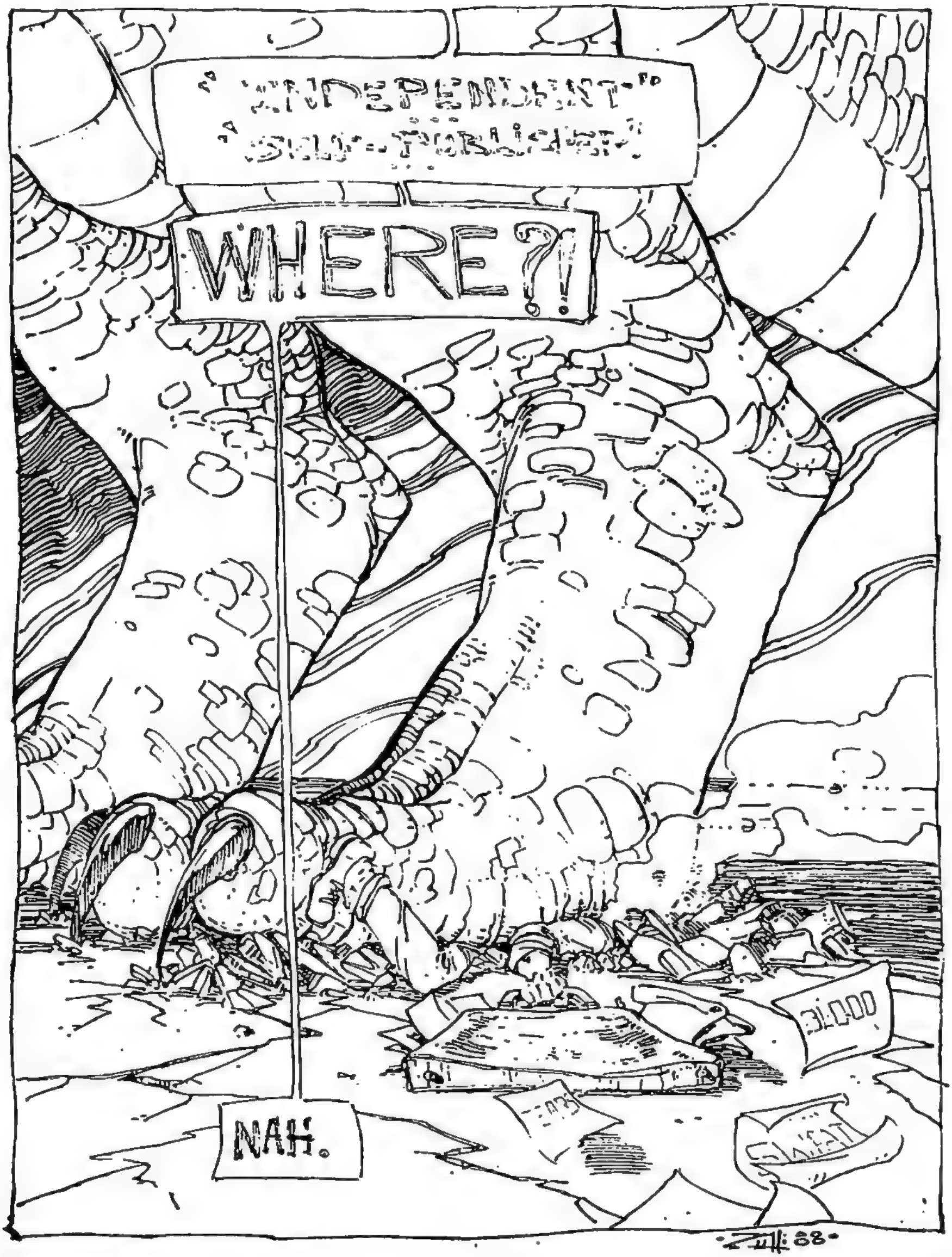
And so our carefully laid plans were for naught. We do not feel that we can properly evaluate the success or failure of the promotion campaign that we had planned.

Who is to blame? Or is anyone to blame at all? Did the whole thing just "happen?" Here is one of the other frustrating aspects of being a "co-publisher": we don't pay the bills, so it can often be quite difficult answering such questions.

Another illustration: One of the greatest concerns we had with doing a bi-weekly book (even just four issues) was whether the printer would (could?) maintain a bi-weekly schedule. We were assured there would be no problem so long as we delivered our goods on time.

The first issue of *Suburban Nightmares* was scheduled to ship July 8 (with a box of 300 copies available a week earlier for the Chicago Comicon) and be on sale approximately July 15. We were told to have all artwork to the printer by May 27. We actually delivered all artwork for the first issue by April 20, and for the second issue by May 20.

On June 24, we had not yet seen so much as a cover


"INDEPENDENT"
"SELF-PUBLISHED"
WHERE?!
NAH.

proof. When we called the printer we found that no work had apparently been started on the interior or the cover; they had not yet been told how many copies to print and were waiting. When we contacted Deni she was unaware that there were any problems. She did not know how long the printer had had our artwork.

She contacted the printer and told them to print both of the first two issues and ship them immediately. We finally received our copies of the first issue July 21 and the book went on sale July 29.

Did the printer hold up the book for lack of funds? Had Deni indeed not given him the print run quantity? We don't know, and regardless of who tells us what, and regardless of how many times we are told, we will never know for sure. And it can be damned frustrating at times.

But at least we did learn something from the process. It amazed us to find that Deni was not constantly aware of the status of all of the issues of all of her books at the printers -- she was *surprised* when we told her our first issue had not yet been printed.

Similar problems, though not as severe, have arisen before. Because we are not the publisher, it can at times be difficult to get information on why ads are late or books don't ship, or foreign rights contracts haven't been mailed to us, etc.

Now, you might say, fine, I'm willing to take on a bit more work in order to make more money. Watch out -- you might be fooling yourself. You *wouldn't believe* how much time this all takes, and how much it cuts into your creative time. You'll find yourself designing ads, or talking to the printer, or yakking with the publisher instead of doing the one thing you set out to do in the first place: create a comic, tell a story.

And every minute you are away from the creative end is very likely costing you money.

So Why Not Self-Publish?

For the exact same reasons.

Hey, if you don't need an editor and are willing to deal with printers, distributors, advertisers, your collaborators (and how *they* get paid), your fans -- if you're willing to draw your own ads, write your own copy, or hire other people to do it (and of course keep all the money for yourself) -- then by all means, self-publishing is the way to go.

But if you want to *tell the damn story*, forget it.

The Question

To co-publish, or not to co-publish?

Are you in comics for the money? If so, then *forget* co-publishing. There are too many risks as far as money is concerned. Go work for somebody on a page rate basis. Get good. Get rich. Then maybe your name can pull you through a co-publishing deal.

Have you got a *story* that you've just got to tell? Well, if you absolutely *must* tell it your own way, then either self-publish (with all its attendant hassles) or co-publish. You're taking risks on the money side, but then you're not in this game for the big bucks, are you?

If you're willing to risk having to compromise somewhat on the story, and especially if you need editorial guidance, then find yourself a good publisher who has an interest in the story you want to tell and work your best deal with them. You may be trading a bit of creative freedom for a bit of money, but some people need at least a little security!

Again, know just whom you are getting into bed with. Whatever terms you come to in any agreement, understand them clearly, understand what is required of you in the relationship with the publisher.

Are we happy with *our* relationship with Deni Loubert and Renegade Press? Yes and no. There've been hassles, and some dashed expectations, but we've also learned a hell of a lot.

The money: We like the method of calculating our share. We don't like the *amount* we got paid, but that has to do with poor sales, and the lack of support Renegade gets from retailers and distributors.

Creative freedom: Yeah we had it, in gobs. We could probably have used an editor on both *The Silent Invasion* and *Suburban Nightmares*. But we knew we weren't getting that when we signed with Deni.

Re-ponsibilities: To tell you the honest truth we like getting involved in all of the peripheral responsibilities of publishing a comic book. But not to the extent that we did. We'd rather be telling more stories.

Will we consider co-publishing again with Renegade or another publisher? Who can really say? When we look at future projects, we'll be considering the above factors. We'll open our eyes, put our brains in gear...

And learn from experience.

Back Issues

#1 (April 1988): The Trial of Friendly Frank's, Geppi/Sim Part 1, Marvel's Back-of-Voucher Agreement, the Statement of Intent. Illustrations by Aragones, Bissette, Miller, Siencewicz $2.50

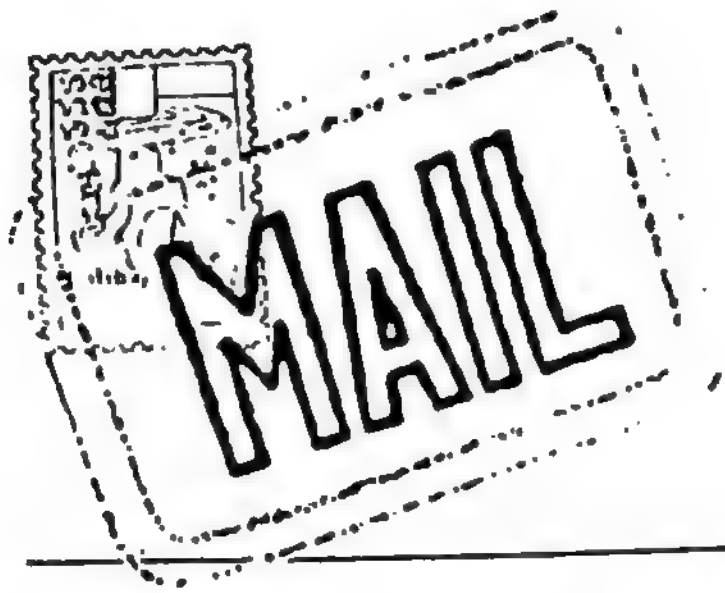
#2 (May 1988) Geppi/Sim Part 2, Christy Marx vs. The Censors, Darrow artwork ripped off, None Dare Call it Payola, Stevens Slimed, . Illustrations by Anderson, Bissette, Darrow, Miller..... $2.50

#3 (June 1988) Diamond/Aardvark War Ends, Askwith on Canadian TV, Staff Infection, Waiting for Giordano, The Anti-Voucher Agreement, Aircel vs. Creators, The Politics of Cowardice (Bissette), Part 1, Comics Lexicon. Illustrations by Laird, Miller, Zulli..... $2.50

#4 (July 1988) The Siegel and Schuster Affair, Gerber on Truth, Justice, and THe Corporate Conscience, The Politics of Cowardice continues, Illustrations by Bissette, Miller, Sim $2.50

#5 (August 1988) Mike Barr on the DC Silver Age Purge, the new DC Deal, Blackthorne and the IRS, The Freelancer is Always Wrong, Bissette continues. Illustrations by Miller, Sim..... $2.50

WAPI, 1879 East Orange Grove, Pasadena CA 91104.



Send letters to:

WAP!,
1879 East Orange Grove
Pasadena CA 91104

All opinions expressed in letters are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of this newsletter or its editors or publisher. All comics freelancers are invited to air their views in WAP!

Dear Editors,

Let me first offer my congratulations for *WAP!* It's long been needed and is much appreciated.

The first three issues, however, have each left me a little confused. I've read a lot about the horrors of dealing with publishers and distributors, but little regarding the realities of self-publishing. When are we going to get some solid information?

As a very small-timer, I'm hoping to learn by what you guys are able to do and advise What should I be looking for as an ideal scenario? What are the more likely alternatives? What amounts of capital are involved? What kind of return might I expect? What problems can you help me to avoid?

I hope to see a larger percentage of WAP!'s future issues devoted to the "how to's" of self-publishing and succeeding in our industry. Printing fewer of the self-deprecating diatribes, such as these written by Mr. Sim, should leave you more room to deal with the real business at hand. How about it?

Thanks!
Stephen J. Rock
Mahopac, NY

Dear *WAP!* Guys:

I read with interest about the aborted *Rolling Stone* piece in issue #4 and do wonder if you have any background about how Bob Kane managed to swing his deal with National, and what he actually did obtain regarding rights, credit and such, and for what period of time.

Also, any comments on how to handle work-for-hire for individual creators? An example might be doing an Epic book for Marvel, in which the original artist leaves and you are then hired by the creator/writer to draw the book and are paid by him for art and any royalties.

And any comment about dealing with shop situations? We have heard *The Comics Journal* discuss Eisner, and shops were prevalent in the early days of comics (both Siegel & Shuster and Kane had shops before DC brought the creative talent in-house), and I would suspect that Continuity could be considered a shop on some projects.

Joel Thingvall
St. Paul, MN

Dear Brad,

Many, any thanks for sending me the sample copy of your *WAP!* I read every word in the issue just about *twice*!

I especially enjoyed Steve Gerber's article about Siegel and Shuster. I was one of their pencillers on their *Funnyman* in '47 and '48 so I had a special interest, and the article aroused some memories.

Of course, the "Aging Pro" article awakened me, too, to a possible reason why I don't get so much work!

Thanks again.
Dick Ayers
White Plains, NY

Hello:

Earlier this year I spent some time writing to my Senators and Congressmen regarding the 1986 tax situation for creative people. I received some interesting replies (some more interesting than others but all pretty straightforward and concerned.)

This was waiting for me when I returned from the San Diego Comic Con. Perhaps others are already familiar with H.R. #4333 described in this copy of Owen Pickett's letter but I thought it was worth passing on just in case. I haven't seen much mention of this situation in *WAP!*

For myself, I was pleased with the response I got from the Congressmen I wrote to. I can only recommend that others write to their Senators and Congressmen to let them know how you feel about the 1986 tax disaster. I received a personal reply to each of my letters. It would seem there's more sympathy in Congress for the artist and writer than I would have guessed.

Don't wait & bitch about it later. Do it now.

Kay Reynolds
Norfolk, VA

Letter from Owen Pickett:

Dear Ms Reynolds:

Knowing of your interest in the uniform capitalization provision of the Tax Reform Act of 1986, I thought you would like to know that the House of Representatives today passed a bill to address your concerns.

H.R. 4333, the Miscellaneous Revenue Act, is a "revenue-neutral" bill designed to make certain technical corrections to existing tax law, but it also contains certain substantive revenue provisions. Among the bill's 960 pages is a *provision to exempt freelance writers, artists, and photographers from the uniform capitalization rules established by the*

1986 law. Under this new Act, which passed the House today by a vote of 380 to 25, *writers, artists, and photographers would be permitted to deduct expenses associated with their freelance businesses as the expenses are incurred, in order to simplify record-keeping and make the tax treatment of these groups similar to those afforded to others engaged in providing personal services.*

If this bill passes the Senate and is signed into law by the President, the change would be effective retroactively to the effective date of the 1986 Tax Reform Act.

I hope you will find this information encouraging. If there are other matters before Congress in which you have an interest, please be sure and let me know.

With kindest regards, I am
Sincerely,
Owen B. Pickett
Member of Congress

Thank you very much for this important information, Kay. The reason you haven't read much about the tax situation in WAP! is that we're still trying to figure it out.

Gentlemen,

I am a freelancer in the industry and have been interested in subscribing to *WAP!* since I first read about it in *The Journal*. I received a copy of issue #4 from Mr. Grant at the San Diego convention and was finally able to nail down the address. Enclosed is a check for the freelancer's rate for subscription.

I'd also like to say that while I don't agree with some aspects within *WAP!*, I fully support much of it and am glad it exists. Unlike some, I couldn't care less as to some of the proposed "motives" behind it (besides the obvious ones) -- I'm just glad something like it exists. There is no union for the funnybook person, there is damned little education beyond the "live and learn" (or live and never learn) system of getting burned financially or creatively by the publishers. It is a strange industry, with not only the problems inherent in any artform/entertainment field, but the special oddities presented in comics. Although *The Journal* and *WAP!* seem to be a bit (or not a bit?) at odds, they are, to me, the two now strongest areas of information and discussion available to the artist or creator in this field. I believe both publications spit a bit too much bile in places, and have engaged in some petty name-calling and baiting. (I personally found your Fantagraphics snipe kinda snotty and much more personal than most of the gossip section.) Whatever. Industry politics and personal dislikes will always be with us, especially in an industry as small as this. I would like it if personal attitudes could be segregated from the individual's work ethic and abilities, however.

If you don't mind some further comment: Love the logo, like the general layout (can't complain much, I know all involved have "day jobs"), I liked the sidebar on Trademark ownership in #4 -- freelancers can be very ignorant of much of what legally concerns their work -- I know I've been at times. A general education of the creators rights -- and options, especially, will hopefully lead to the kind of creator publisher relationship we need. As pointed out, the lure of drawing Spider-Man for $bucks!$ is more than enough for some folks. For some, that's their only professional goal. But for others who may want to work on personal material (solely or as side-work), the choices are limited -- sell your baby to the big boys, have a professionally produced book, let them screw with the concept and own as much of it as they can get. And you gotta be a *name* to even do that. Or self-publish which can ruin you or make you (but the risk, man, the risk). Or go to the independents, pray like hell, and get a day job to pay the bills.

We gotta get together, we gotta get smarter. We gotta know which guys not to work for, who doesn't play fair. I like the fact that *WAP!* can provide a service of pointing out injustices within the industry, past and present. We have to learn from the unfortunately histories of the men and women who, at times, literally slaved for this medium. And were lied to. And were cheated. It would benefit the freelancer. It would benefit the industry; we are not going to get the best work of our people until they feel it will be presented fairly and professionally. Why get ripped off in comics when a freelancer can take a bottom level television gig and get rooked for more money? We're gonna lose our best people to other mediums -- the other showbizzes ain't saints, but the money's there and it's a lure -- money and recognition.

And when the best work is presented in comics, it will bring more people into his industry. People will follow *Love and Rockets* or *Cerebus* to the grave, *Fantastic Four* or *Superman*is generally read until the discovery of one's sexual needs. Most extensive national comics coverage has been for creations of one or two people, personally realized projects, comics by creators, not by committee. Everyone knows it. There's just a lot of people who want to keep their job, get their friends jobs, or have dinner on a tab. That won't change. What I'm trying to say, in my long-winded and unfocussed fashion is, let's have pride in ourselves and in our abilities. Don't apologize for doing work that enables you to eat, but put everything in context and perspective. Think about what you're really doing when you "ape" Jack Kirby for that check. It diminishes his work, your work; it gives lie to Marvel's claim it owes him nothing. It makes you interchangeable.

It's the McDonald's way of thinking: the employee is not valuable, there are thousands more of fit the suit, the company is all that really matters. Sure, you can't argue with success. But success and quality are two separate things. Freelancers should ask themselves serious questions about their work that has nothing to do with physical abilities. Where do you want to be in this industry, how do you want to be remembered? As a grave-robber, pockets stuffed with someone else's money? I truly believe some people think it's morally okey-dokey to emulate, ape, swipe, steal and copy other people's work. It's fostered by company policies. It's been done forever. It's "homage." It's easy. And even when it's out-and-out thievery, it's never punished, rarely challenged.

Education can hopefully affect

these attitudes, these practices. If you truly love Kirby's work, buy some back issues. Tell Marvel to return his work. Stop drawing like him. Treat the other greats, who were never treated well, with equal respect. What do you want your reputation to be? How do you want to be treated? How would you feel in Jack Kirby's position? Would you feel you were being paid homage to? Certainly, not paid.

WAP! should continue to point out problems, even if it doesn't have the answers. Say what you will about *The Journal* and any excesses it may have, it has to be the only alternative. It has changed minds. It supports intelligence, logic and creativity. I believe it and *WAP!* are the only alternatives we have to mindset and dumbness besides quitting the industry.

Last bits -- perhaps a legal expert on the board? More instances of creators raped in the past, maybe these horror stories'll set someone straight. I think we need discussion of the distribution system (I believe distributors would all be happy if everyone shut down besides Marvel and DC, even though the guys who work for them mainly read indies), no more letters from James van Hise as long as he's going to be a hypocrite -- his letter is full of him criticizing people's attitudes and book lines, and then lamenting he didn't get work from them. What the hell is that? I think the entire letter section needs heavier editing, rundowns of every freelancer's aspirations, credits and problems would make *WAP!* a monthly 1,000 page manga. (Anger-manga?) We do need the finger-pointing, tho', maybe a publisher will send a check or two out if he doesn't feel like reading about it in *WAP!* Or potential employees reading it and turning down work. Which reminds me, don't deal with Triad Publications. They do the *Honeymooners* book and are trying to do other books. The editorial/$ people are confused, impossible to deal with, and make promises. That's my tip; take it from experience.

Excuse the length and sprawling quality of this letter. It was not thought out in advance as I did not intend to write it. This was just supposed to be a subscription check and a little note. I gotta get back to work. I thank whoever is reading this for their time, I thank *WAP!* for the possibilities it offers and is offering. Let's try not to alienate people with this thing, let's make a better industry. Let's do good work and be "happy". Or at least die trying.

Evan Dorkin
Staten Island, NY

People,

If we as freelancers had merely to contend with the corporate greed, the self-righteous pomposity, and that bothersome nearly psychotic contempt most editors have for those whose talents they so ardently feed upon...well, that would be one thing. Unfortunately, though, in the wonderful world of comics, one also has to cope with gross editorial incompetence, and often that can be even more injurious to one's emotional and financial well-being than is the hatred, mainly because incompetence is so unpredictable; you never know what these fools are going to foul up next. Rest assured, though, no matter what it is, they'll find some way to make YOU pay for their mistakes.

Consider, for example, my most recently run-in with the editorial idiots at DC Comics Incorporated. Over a year ago, I developed an idea for a series entitled "Totem" and submitted it to DC. They liked the idea, made my old drinking buddy Dennis J. O'Neil my editor, had me write the first issue -- a double issue, 38 pages -- and even paid me for it. Things were looking fine.

And, things were moving fast too. Denny asked me to plot the second issue (a twenty-pager); I did so; he approved the plot and told me to get started on the script. Once I had finished the script, I did get to wondering where my check for the plot was, but when I called up Denny, he said not to worry, that the check "was in the mail." That right there, of course, should have tipped me off that all was not well, but I was simply in too good a mood to pick up on subtleties, glad to finally be working in comics again. I even asked Denny if he wanted me to go ahead and plot the third issue. He said "Sure," the more material they had on hand for the artist they were still searching for the better it would be for everyone.

The next day, that very next day, things were a bit different, for it was then that O'Neil called up and informed me that it was now suddenly company policy not to pay for anything beyond the first issue of any new project -- at least not until after that issue had been drawn in its entirety and then approved by some high mucky-muck panel of people who probably know as much about comics as I know about "thermal dynamics."

When I, in turn, informed O'Neil that refusing to pay me for work that he had ordered and that I had completed was in direct violation of DC's own contract -- specifically Point 2 which reads: "DC hereby agrees to pay Writer Per Page Rate for Pages of Work...and to make such payment within ten working days after the delivery of the completed Work" -- Denny said that the new ruling superseded that. In other words, it was now DC's policy to violate its own contract. An interesting development.

At least that was Denny's version of the way things stood. But it doesn't take an Einstein to figure out what had really happened, that the rule in question had been on the books for some time but O'Neil had either forgotten all about it or failed to find out about it in the first place. Thus, he had blown it when he had ordered the second issue plot, the second issue script, and the third issue plot, blown it quite resoundingly, and was now trying to make ME pay for his incompetence.

Of course, I continued to complain about DC breaking its own contract, and for all my trouble, my old sauce-slopping compadre had the gall to send me -- no, not any of the money I was owed, but a shrill and sanctimonious audio tape upon which he accused me of being an alcoholic, said that I and I alone was to blame for everything that had happened, repeatedly compared me to Wally Wood, and said that if I didn't shape up (i.e., quit complaining about being ripped off) he would give my series (my creation) to some other writer. Whew!

Really. I kid you not. This tape has to be heard to be believed. It's

got everything. Confession. Compassion. Pathos: Denny feeling sorry for himself and then getting angry about the fact that I apparently have more friends than he does (eh?). A short and fairly silly section in which Denny starts ranting about "Jesus." And, just to give it a folksy touch, Denny left the recorder on while he was building himself a sandwich and later while he was taking a leak. Wow, the actually sounds of Denny O'Neil pissing -- this ought to be a fan favorite. And, don't worry, kids -- I plan to have copies of this tape available for purchase at the next convention I attend. Gotta make something outta this.

Meanwhile, DC still owed me $1833.40 (my page rate ain't the highest in the world), and some "suit" up there is still trying to decide whether or not to publish "Totem." I'm not holding my breath on either of those. But -- oops! -- since it's still under consideration maybe I shouldn't have given away the series' name. Gee, I sure hope by doing so I haven't queered the deal. As for me, in order to feed my face, I recently landed a job as a bartender. Go figure.

Steve Skeates
Alfred, New York

WAP! has obtained a copy of the tape to which Steve Skeates makes reference in his letter. Skeates's description of its content is accurate.

Dear Steven [Grant]:

I just got a look at WAP! #5, and I wanted to send along my thanks. You had the opportunity, in San Diego, to dismiss my ravings as the product of a bruised ego. Instead, you clearly took me seriously and listened to what I had to say. The even-handedness, and downright graciousness, of your response was a genuine treat. This is precisely the kind of cooperation I was talking about in San Diego. If I can help in any way to make WAP! a more accurate and valuable tool to the freelance community I'll be delighted. While reasonable people may disagree over means, I support your ends wholeheartedly. Also, thanks are due for a well-balanced discussion of the new DC contract. Any summary so brief is going to gloss over some key points, but on balance I think you've captured the flavor of it.

On a final note, I've heard rumors from a variety of sources that you have a copy of either the DC or Piranha contract, or both, and that you plan on printing it them in its/their entirety. While I can't say I'm totally thrilled by this prospect, because I think contracts should be reviewed by counsel rather than tried in the press, I bow to its inevitability. However, a request: If you're going to print our contract, how about printing others? Why not an Epic contract, which Steve Leialoha indicates isn't so hot? How about a First or Eclipse contract? Why should we take all the heat? I'm not claiming that the new Piranha contract is the greatest thing since sliced bread, but I do think it represents substantial improvements over previous business practices, and could easily be the best overall contract in the business. If you're going to bash us, why not truly provide a service to your readers, and give them a look at the alternatives? I know I'd be interested. Enough for now. We all have jobs here. Again, thanks for your open-mindedness, and best of luck.

Mark Nevelow
New York, NY

In the future, and over the course of several issues, WAP! plans to publish and analyze -- with benefit of counsel -- a broad range of representative contracts from a wide variety of publishers, both majors and independents. Eventually, we hope to cover everything from the standard Marvel and DC voucher forms to complex graphic novel and creator-ownership agreements.

Dear People:

I like these fierce & surly politix -- it's about fuggin' time. Mediocrity-mongering through incomplete-if-not-fallacious communications, the sleazy tactics of biz-think as applied to the product-that-is-comics, too often allows the most psychotic-mutant fen-into-men-monsters to appear rock-solid-righteous while freelancing victims sit around the house developing art-hypochondria.

I *hate* it when that happens.

But I *love* how ya dish it up. Good timing, as the industry's got to evolve or embarrass-itself-while-dying in a glacial encrustation of pandering principles, conscienceless manipulation of pieceworkers and licentious licensing habits. So, nu? Have at it!!!

Leslie Sternbergher
New York, NY

WAP! STILL WANTS YOU, NO MATTER WHAT!

WAP! wants articles, letters, cartoons, news, gossip, and entries for our Lexicon from all comic book freelancers...and that includes *you*.

You don't have to be a "big name" in the industry. This is a forum for inkers, letterers, and colorists, too. If you want anonymity, we'll delete your byline on request. (Unfortunately, we can't accept anonymous submissions; we have to know who you are.)

The address for editorial contributions is:

WAP!
1879 East Orange Grove
Pasadena, CA 91104

A Brief Story About Respect

There was once a young man who sold his labors to The Company. He was paid very well for his labors, but having been duly paid, he was expected to continue laboring forever and ever in The Company's name.

And he did, for he was proud of The Company and he respected all that it stood for. And as he labored he began to believe that since he was giving The Company 100% of his effort and The Company was reaping a reasonable harvest in the fruits of his labor, he in turn had received the respect of the company he worked for.

But as the years passed and the young man became increasingly aware of the potential in his craft, the rushed, immediate nature of The Company made itself conspicuous in the number of silly gaffes and annoying mistakes evident in its finished product.

This bothered the young man and he did what he could to help solve the problem, but short of producing the product himself, he could only do so much towards helping the product realize its full potential.

It just wasn't enough.

The young man decided to produce his own product and strive for the perfection he desired, so having given his notice, The Company unwittingly sent him off with a denouncement rather than the denouement he'd expected.

It wasn't necessary, but when the malapropism was brought to their attention, The Company agreed to a public apology for their oversight, and as fine an apology as it was, they'd made it to the wrong young man, for they'd misspelled his name.

Respect is a difficult thing to earn and even more difficult to maintain.

The young man is now happy and content with his creative autonomy.

— Brent Eric Anderson

Steve Bissette:

The Politics of Cowardice, Pt. 3

"The Rating Game"

[A note from the editors: This article was originally written for The Comics Buyer's Guide *in early 1987, but never saw print there. It has not been rewritten to accommodate changes in the scene that have occurred since then, and we ask the reader to keep that in mind. Most of this final portion was originally published in slightly differed form in* Comics Interview.*]*

The immediate cause for concern lies in the question, "How is the simple act of labeling or rating a comic considered an act of censorship?" (I have already considered in an earlier segment whether labeling is effective "protection" against possible arrest or enforced external censorship; obviously, it is not, and the bust of Friendly Frank's proves that.) To answer this question, we must agree on some working definitions for the words that are being bandied about so freely by all sides in this debate.

Since the earliest discussions of this issue, there have been crippling confusions over the constant redefinition and clarification of the "labels" or "ratings" that are proposed as solutions to the imagined threat we "must" fear. Even in the context of *The Comics Journal*'s active catalytic role in the debate, the confusion of the nature and implementation of the proposed "labels" and or "ratings" led to muddled conclusions. Gary Groth, in his editorial in *TCJ* #88, seems to be arguing for "labeling," while in the same issue (and more prominently in *TCJ* #85) Jab Strand clearly calls for the establishment of a "ratings" system, even proposing a system modeled directly upon the MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America) movie ratings system. Careful reading shows them to be at cross-purposes.

For the sake of this discussion, let us agree upon working definitions and distinctions between "labels" and "ratings." Bear with me...

Let us say that a *label* is placed voluntarily on a completed work of comic art. The labeling is not a mandatory company or industry practice; it is the decision of the creator and/or the publisher to label, or not to label, once they have assessed the completed comic. The comic book is created and executed without regard for the label. Hence the label itself is neither a restriction nor a goal. It has no real importance to the creator or publisher -- it is only important to the retailer and consumer as a means of identifying the content and tone of the comic.

In all respects, it is merely a *label*.

Now let us say a *rating* is *required* labeling of all works of comic art. All books *must* be rated, either by company or (shudder) industry rule and enforcement. If they are not rated, they are unlikely to be promoted and or tolerated in the commercial marketplace. Furthermore, certain ratings subject books to "controlled distribution"; i.e., they are not promoted or distributed in certain locales and commercial outlets. Since the rating is a standard of the company and/or industry, and may determine the commercial success and survival of the book, the rating *must* be considered during all aspects of the creation and execution of "the work." By its very existence and use it becomes a restriction and or goal, determining the nature of the book as it also determines the target audience and place within the marketplace. The ratings system also requires the establishment and support of a ratings bureau or board, responsible for the "fair" application and enforcement of the ratings themselves.

Keep these working definitions in mind throughout this article. They help us answer the question I raised earlier.

In a nutshell, labeling or rating is not an act of censorship if it does not alter or interfere with the creative process. If it *does* alter or obstruct the creative process, it is indeed a form of censorship.

Given our working definitions, any sort of ratings system is certainly censorship, however much its advocates may insist otherwise.

> *"When there are no formal rules, no thou shalts and thou shalt nots, it is difficult to notice, even, that one is being censored. It is all so painless. It is still more difficult to understand that one may be censoring oneself, extensively, ruthlessly -- because that act of self-censorship is called, with full social approval, 'writing for the market'; it is even used by some writers as the test and shibboleth for that most admired state of being, 'professionalism.'*
>
> *"Indeed, to distinguish free enterprise from self-censorship takes a most uncomfortable degree of vigilance. And that so easily becomes paranoia."*
>
> —Ursula K. LeGuin,
> *"The Stain In The Soul"*

The most unsettling thing about DC Comics' letter and statement of standards and practices is that it gives no clue as to what these measures will be implemented or how they will interact (if at all) with the Comics Code Authority. Given the current state of confusion at DC, it seems they hadn't really thought through the implementation of their ratings system. The stated guidelines are so open to interpretation that the necessity of forming a bureau (of editors? assistants? production people?) to translate and put into effect the new policies seems unavoidable. As DC remains mum as to how the ratings system will work (if at all; currently most editors deny its very existence, insisting that it was merely a public relations gesture that will have no impact upon DC product or relations with creative personnel -- though, of course, it already has, as we have all seen), we can only guess what might have been or may yet be. It seems fair to base such conjecture on the workings of the model for DC's system, the MPAA ratings system.

At this point, let me ignore DC's particular proposed system and consider instead the possibility of *any* rating system working in the comics industry. Or should I say

not working, either as a solution to the current fears of distributors and retailers, or as a fair method of simply labeling product for merchants and readers. You may insist that I've stacked the deck with my working definition of *rating*, but I base my definition on the actual practice and very real ramifications of the MPAA's existing ratings system.

The assumption (another gross assumption) from the beginning of this debate has been that the MPAA ratings system is a successful, viable model of how such a system *should* work, a perfect, obviously practicable

what he chose in the way and form he determined without anyone forcing him to cut one millimeter of film or threatening to refuse him exhibition... I would hope it is fair to say that today the screen has never been more free from the standpoint of the filmmaker's right to create any story he wants to tell. And at the same time, the public is better advised in advance by the ratings about the content of films than ever before."

—Jack Valenti,
President of the MPAA

The ratings are not merely advisory labels placed on the films for the benefit of the public. They have become a power in the marketplace, subject to manipulation, corruption, and abuse.

"role model" that can and should be emulated. Its acceptance in the motion picture industry and its longevity would seem to justify its practice, and public awareness of its workings would seem to confirm its viability. Recent public outcry over the effectiveness of the PG rating led to prompt institution of a new rating, PG-13, to indicate films that can be attended by children, though parental discretion is "advised" due to the "intense" nature of the film's content. Such quick dealing with a designated "flaw" in the ratings system was applauded, and seemed to further justify its existence.

Comic creator Jan Strnad presented his carefully researched proposal for self-regulation of the comics industry in "Bitter Harvest" (*Comics Journal* #85). The thrust of his article was very specific, outlining Jan's own suggested Comic Book Ratings System, acknowledging his own emulation of the MPAA system. His ratings -- "A" for all readers, "P" for parental discretion, "M" for mature readers, and "X" for adults only -- echo the MPAA's -- "G" for general audiences, "PG" (originally "M," then "GP") for parental discretion, with the later addition of PG-13 as further gradation, "R" for restricted audiences with no one under 17 admitted without parent or guardian, and "X" for adults only -- and clearly foreshadowing DC's -- "U" for universal, "M" for mature audiences, and "A" for adults only.

Jan lays his groundwork with an accurate chronology of the motion picture industry's struggle with self-regulation since its beginnings. Significantly, Jan ends this chronology with the establishment of the MPAA code in 1968, and its intent as stated by MPAA president Jack Valenti. Jan doesn't continue his chronology with an account of the practical applications of Valenti's fair-sounding ideals. Therein lies my own difficulty with accepting Jan's case. He doesn't follow his chronology through, for to do so reveals the MPAA system, despite Valenti's stated intentions and the longevity of the system, does *not* work. The movie ratings system has become an active form of commercial censorship of the most elusive and insidious kind.

"From the very beginning of my tenure at the [MPAA], I had sought a way to assure freedom of the screen, to underbrace the right of the filmmaker to say

"We submitted the film to them six times. The trims were literally one frame at a time... The woman I talked to, Lola Mintz [of the Los Angeles MPAA Branch] told me, 'If some movies were being rated today, they'd get an X.' She mentioned The Exorcist, The Thing, and Alien. The one they felt the most upset about allowing to go through with an R rating is Friday The 13th. Now they've set a precedent for the horror films to follow. Still, they're more repressive now than they've ever been...

"There are no published standards for what is allowable or not allowable for certain ratings. The first thing they tell you is that they are not censoring your movie, they are just 'grading' it. You are free to accept the rating or not. But if you go out with no rating, you'll be lucky to do half the business... An unrated film is treated like an X-rated film, no one under 18 is admitted. That cuts out a huge amount of your audience..."

—Stuart Gordon,
director of *Reanimator* and *From Beyond*

I hope these quotes indicate how the ratings system has already evolved from noble commitments into an arbitrary, despicably covert system of censorship, directly influencing the very manner in which American films are made (i.e., as in our working definition, altering and even obstructing the creative process as the rating itself becomes a commercial goal). The Catch-22, the obligatory denial of "censorship" even as they call for the snipping and recutting of literally miles of film footage, is that the filmmaker *need not accept* the rating the board gives his/her film. Indeed, the R rating is a contractual commitment for most filmmakers. Clive Barker, in his directorial debut film, *Hellraiser*, *had* to "play ball" with the MPAA to secure the R rating his contract specifically demanded. For as uninhibited a horror writer as Barker whose excesses often lend vital substance to his stories (like George Romero before him), such a creative compromise may prove telling. More to the point, the R vs. X controversies over Brian DePalma's *Scarface* (1983), Alan Parker's *Angel Heart* (1987) and Eddie Murphy's *Raw* (1987) make it clear that the threat of an X leads *directly* to active censorship. These films *had* to be cut to

attain the R rating.

The marketplace has so thoroughly stacked the deck against *unrated* films (particularly *independent* unrated films) that for many filmmakers there is little choice but to cooperate with the board and, when necessary, alter the "completed" work accordingly. I hesitate to say "completed" because the ratings themselves have become goals, significantly controlling the final shape the films take during the editing process. Though *legally* no film is being refused exhibition, the end result is the same: with few exceptions, unrated films are treated as X-rated films, meaning very limited access to theatrical distribution. Most newspapers will not advertise them as a matter of policy. They are therefore denied even moderate production budgets since they have little chance of returning costs, let alone profit, in such a controlled marketplace. (Unlike comics, film production of even the most rudimentary kind is a very expensive proposition these days.)

The classic example of this involved independent Pittsburgh filmmaker George Romero. (For a fuller discussion of Romero's conflicts not only with the MPAA but with Laurel Entertainment – originally formed to realize Romero's work, only to make his needs of secondary importance once Laurel's growth as a corporation ceased to depend entirely on his work -- I urge you to read Paul R. Gayne's dreadfully titled but well written *The Zombies That Ate Pittsburgh* (Dodd, Mead and Co., 1987). It is the definitive overview of Romero's career.) After the notoriety and success of his unrated first film, *Night Of The Living Dead* (1968) -- a film which in its own way may have led to the enforcement of the MPAA rating system -- Romero continued to work in comparative obscurity until the success of the 1978 sequel, *Dawn Of The Dead*. At the time, many considered Romero's decision to release *Dawn Of The Dead* without an MPAA rating a brazen and foolhardy move.

The MPAA-dominated marketplace had no room for his incredibly violent -- but utterly sexless -- adventure/horror film unless he agreed to cut the film into insensibility to attain the "safety" of an R rating. Given the persistent public equation of the X rating with sex and pornography by the mid-1970s, Romero saw little alternative to releasing his uncut film sans rating. When the film met with phenomenal worldwide financial success, Romero's stand was vindicated.

It seemed he had beaten the system.

Soon the major studios were picking up independent (and, usually, explicitly violent) horror films in hopes of striking the same vein of gold *with* the sanction of the MPAA's R rating, most notably with Paramount's *Friday The 13th* series. By that process, in the span of only a few years, the marketplace had squeezed out the possibility of another *truly* independent wild card meeting public acceptance and financial reward.

By the 1980s, the ground Romero had broken buried him. Still refusing to submit to the MPAA (with the notable exception of his collaboration with pop writer Stephen King on 1982's *Creepshow*), Romero was unable to raise the necessary financing to produce the third film in the trilogy, *Day Of The Dead*, as the ambitious, unrated epic he had envisioned. In the end, the budget for *Day* was cut drastically, forcing hasty, debilitating reconstruction of the script and the entire production mere weeks before filming. Released unrated in 1985, the film found few playdates as most theaters, especially the proliferating shopping mall chains, refused to accept unrated, independent fare as a matter of policy.

Thus even *unrated* films now suffer very real censorship within the confines of a commercial marketplace that seems irrevocably wedded to the whims of the rating system it nurtures and subscribes to.

Even more disturbing in its duplicity is the manner in which the goal of a particular rating may not only result in the removal of unapproved content, but in the corruption of a film via the *addition* of stronger content. For instance, a horror film *without* an R rating has been considered an uncommercial proposition since the mid-70s. Cases in point: John Carpenter's *The Fog* (1979) and Wes Craven's *Deadly Friend* (1986) were both understated, atmospheric genre exercises, and the studios *insisted* on the shooting and insertion of explicit violence to bring the films up to the desired R rating.

One must question the validity of a ratings system whose standards (i.e., the factors that determine what rating is applicable to a given film and why) remain so amorphous and ever-changing. The clearest example is that films that were rated M (the early equivalent of today's PG-13) in the early 70s would undoubtedly be rated R in the current marketplace (such as the obscure *Blood And Lace* (1970) and the mainstream John Wayne rites-of-passage Western, *The Cowboys* (1971), both of which are graphically violent.) A decade need not pass for the fluctuating standards of the MPAA to be seen. The public acceptance and critical prestige earned by *Midnight Cowboy* (1969) and *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) assured their shift from the original X ratings to the commercially acceptable R ratings with nary a frame cut.

Furthermore, popular and/or influential filmmakers seem able to "buy" the desired rating while other are treated with disdain *because* of their popularity. Had anyone but Steven Spielberg tried to "buy" a PG rating for films like *Poltergeist* (1982), *Gremlins* (1984), and *Indiana Jones And The Temple Of Doom* (1984), the rating board would have balked. However, given Spielberg's prestige within the industry as a financial wizard and popular filmmaker and the fact that the films in question had already been marketed toward a juvenile audience prior to their submission to the rating board (remember the racks and racks of lovable Gremlins dolls?), the golden PG rating was granted. Only after the ensuing parental and public outcry did the MPAA cover their ass with the PG-13 rating.

Isolating the films from these conditions of affluence vs. disdain, there seems to be little consistent application of coherent standards to the films themselves. As a result, the ratings are not merely advisory labels placed on the films for the benefit of the public. They have become a power in the marketplace, subject to manipulation, corruption and abuse.

There is no reason to believe that such would not be the case in the comics industry if, indeed, individual companies or the industry as a whole chose to institute and implement a ratings system of any kind.

WORKERS UNITE!

Frank Miller, Steve Gerber, and Steven Grant have joined forces to create an up-to-the-minute, irreverent, and *honest* newsletter especially for comics freelancers, with contributions from major writers and artists in the industry, including **Alan Moore, Bill Sienkiewicz, Dave Sim, Stephen Bissette**, and many, many others.

Join them! Subscribe to *WAP!* now at the charter rate of $25.00 a year. That's a break-even, no-profit rate, for freelancers *only*. *

[ ] Sign me up for one year of WAP! at the exclusive Freelancers Rate of $25.00 for twelve issues.*

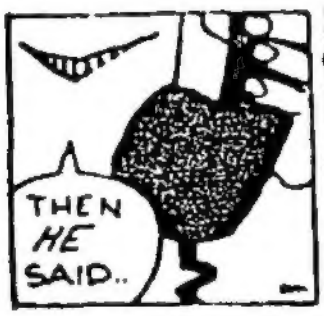
Name:_____

Address:_____

City:_____ State:_____ Zip:_____

Send this form (or just your name and address) to: WAP! ,1879 East Orange Grove Blvd. Pasadena, CA 91104

*1 year/$25.00 rate is available to established freelance professionals only. General public rate is $45.00/year. The rate for full-time employees or executives of publishing companies is $95.00. Rate qualification is the decision of the WAP! Editorial Board.



RUMORS AND INNUENDO

Seems our old editorial friends both **UPTOWN** and **DOWNTOWN** are up to their old games. (While, oddly enough, rumors about the independents have trickled to a halt. Surely there's *something* going on there.) Among the more interesting stories making the rounds:

"WHAT YOU DON'T WRITE WON'T HURT YOU" Dept.: Charter *WAP!* readers will recall the tale of **WRITER X**, that "semi-popular writer" who was bounced off a strip because his editor hadn't told him the strip's new concept and he took the heat for it. Seems **WRITER X** has had more trouble with **THE SAME EDITOR**. As the story goes, **THAT UPTOWN COMPANY** sent out feelers to freelancers to come up with a mythology-based character to rival the longtime hero published by **THAT DOWNTOWN COMPANY. WRITER X** came up with a good one, handed it in, and after weeks still hadn't heard anything back. (Not unusual with **UPTOWN**, actually.) Finally, he calls up **SAME**, who says yes, everyone thought it was really good -- so they're giving it to **RESIDENT SUPERSTAR** to write and draw. (Remember the property was completely original with **WRITER X**, and that **WRITER X** hadn't yet sold it to the company.) There *was* a semi-happy ending, though: **WRITER X** complained to **UPTOWN's EXECUTIVE EDITOR** and wrangled development money and a creative credit on the finished product. (We should also note that **RESIDENT SUPERSTAR** was unaware of the source of the concept when he took on the assignment, and his direction differs greatly from **WRITER X's**.)

"WADING THROUGH IT" Dept.: He's a **NEW UPTOWN ASSISTANT EDITOR** with a big agenda. (Acquaintances from his fan days recall how he used to tell everyone of his plans for **UPTOWN's** characters, which he is now in a position to put into practice as current company "caretaker" of the origins of those characters.) **NEW** has been attempting fast ones on some of the more renowned talents in the business. Notably, that famous writer **MR. CONTINUITY** had plotted a revised origin for an old character, was waiting for the art, and suddenly discovered **NEW** had pulled the scripting chores away and handed them to **OTHER WRITER** – *without* telling him. **OTHER WRITER** was told to completely ignore what **MR. CONTINUITY** had plotted and functionally do a new origin to **NEW's** specifications, even though the new version didn't fit the art. **NEW** then covered his ass in the editorial offices by telling everyone **MR. CONTINUITY** had asked to be let off the assignment...

"WADING THROUGH IT II" Dept.: **AUTHOR X** is currently revamping the origin of the very popular superteam that he and **THAT POPULAR ARTIST** created. Enter **NEW UPTOWN ASSISTANT EDITOR** (yes, the same one) who wants to run a capsule version of the origin in the book he edits. The last installment of the origin in **AUTHOR X's** book won't be written until October; **NEW** doesn't need the capsule version until the summer. With us so far? Despite the schedule, **NEW** kept insisting that the capsule version be done *now*! **AUTHOR X** pointed out that no one would even know for sure what the story *was* until late fall. That didn't matter to **NEW**, who started telling everyone that **AUTHOR X** was not interested in doing the capsule version, though nothing was further from the truth, and **AUTHOR X** had told him so. Turns out that **NEW** had promised the job to a **HOT ARTIST** who was waiting, and instead of giving **HOT** another assignment to tide him over, **NEW** decided to put the squeeze on **AUTHOR X**...

"WADING THROUGH IT III" Dept.: Recently an artist named Greg Brooks was arrested for the killing of his girlfriend. The cause of death was a hammer blow. It takes a special kind of wit to see this as anything but a brutal, tragic incident, but the same **NEW UPTOWN EDITOR** and **HIS BOSS** apparently thought it was a laugh riot. The "Official Greg Brooks Memorial Hammer" now prominently adorns their office wall. *WAP!* can only assume this was done with the tacit approval of **UPTOWN's** management, since none of them have suggested **NEW** take it down, and they don't seem to mind this tacky display reflecting badly on their operation. WAP! applauds **UPTOWN's** recent moves to retool their image with new deals for freelancers, etc., but until the attitudes of many of their editors change, and editorial shenanigans like **NEW's** come to an end, all that effort will accomplish nothing.

MORE STAFF INFECTIONS Dept.: Things aren't much better downtown, where rumors are running rampant. First off, we're besieged by pissed-off freelancers who were asked by **THE DOWNTOWN COMPANY** to submit proposals for new series. Seems **DOWNTOWN** has been seeking ideas along the lines of: humorous super-hero team books, a monster hunter type character, and other concepts that sound strangely derivative of certain titles from **THE UPTOWN COMPANY**. Depending on who tells the story, between thirty and fifty proposals were presented. Finally, **DOWNTOWN** settled on five new series – all manufactured in-house and all set to be scripted by members of the editorial staff. Now

you see why we suggested that companies pay a "rental" fee for solicited proposals...

"PINK SLIPS IN THE SUNSET" Dept.: In the meantime, rumor has it that high on **DOWNTOWN'S** agenda is getting all their books back on schedule, and stories of tough talk abound. One tale has the **EDITOR-IN-CHIEF** threatening to fire any editors who don't have their books on schedule by December. (This might seem Scroogish, but don't think this might be a way to get out of paying Xmas bonuses. The company hasn't paid Xmas bonuses to editorial personnel in years.) A related story has **DOWNTOWN'S VICE PRESIDENT** laying down the law that any editor -- *including* **EDITOR-IN-CHIEF** and **EXECUTIVE EDITOR** -- would be totally ineligible for "freelance" scripting work until the books they edit are all up to date. (Of course, editors who write for their companies aren't "freelancers" but "staff writers.")

"STEPPING IN, STEPPING OUT" Dept. There's some evidence that part two of the last item may be inaccurate, or that **EDITOR-IN-CHIEF** and **EXECUTIVE EDITOR** are ignoring V-P's edict. Seems **E-I-C** and **EE** have "volunteered" to help get some of **DOWNTOWN's** titles (mostly the better selling ones from the sound of it) on schedule by inserting their own fill-ins in the runs. (This despite both **E-I-C** and **EE** reportedly being way behind on the titles they *already* write.) Among those affected is **MR. SUPERSTAR** (no, it's not John Byrne!), one of the last real names still regularly working **DOWNTOWN**. **SUPERSTAR's** title is currently basking in a lot of attention, having just reached a milestone issue, and immediately following that, **EE** slotted in a multi-issue story to reintroduce a minor character who happens to be one of **EE's** longtime pets, with an eye toward launching the minor character into his own title. The result? In the face of seeing his continuity shot to hell, **SUPERSTAR** has left the book, and, according to some editorial sources, may be mad enough to quit the company. Other freelancers are said to be equally upset about the unrequested "help" on their titles.

"STEPPING IN, STEPPING OUT, PT. 2" Dept.: Is there any truth to the rumor that there's a plan afoot to squeeze **MR. MYSTIC** out of his last two **DOWNTOWN** books? (You'll recall we reported a couple of issues ago how he was bumped from a team book he was writing without being notified of it? When confronted, the editor in question said he didn't call because he was trying to avoid unpleasantness.) Editorial has been demanding sweeping, regressive changes in his titles, despite an upward swing in sales on both books. Seems **E-I-C** thinks the cosmic book **MR. MYSTIC** was writing should return to the boring old cliches that drove the character into the ground 20 years ago, and similar conditions are being enforced on that flagship team book he writes. We're told that any variations or innovations he suggests for his material are flatly rejected without consideration. Again, stories emanating from inside **DOWNTOWN** give interesting speculations. One is that **MR. MYSTIC** got a bad reputation because he had the temerity to remind **E-I-C** of a promise of raises for freelancers, a promise that was never kept.

"B-DEE B-DEE THAT'S ALL FOLKS" Dept.: Finally, the story of **CARTOON MAN**, an animation writer who also writes many of **DOWNTOWN's** kiddie toy titles including their **NEW SERIES**, which is the subject of this story. **CARTOON** asked us not to ask him about it because he's afraid of retaliation from **DOWNTOWN**, in the form of loss of work. But people in the animation company doing the animated version of **NEW SERIES** are happy to talk about how they're lifting their stories and characters directly from **CARTOON's** comics stories, without giving pay or credit. Though **DOWNTOWN** has gotten their creative people very good deals on toy and cartoon tie ins in the past, they now show no willingness to take any action on **CARTOON's** behalf. To top it off, **CARTOON** has tried to get scripting work on the animated series (he has the credits to get him in the door) but they don't have any inclination to pay for something they're getting now, completely legally, for free. And people wonder how work-for-hire can hurt you...

SHORT NOTES: Rumors are running rampant of an impending DC implosion, starting with the cancellation of *THE SHADOW*... The story goes that DC publisher Jenette Kahn is taking editors Andy Helfer and Mike Carlin to Florida for a week every month, to rewrite scripts bought for the syndicated *SUPERBOY* tv show. Their absences from the office are reportedly causing big disruptions in their editorial schedules... Freelancers may want to know if their publishers were distributed to bookstores by PMSC, which went bankrupt a couple of months back, leaving many publishers unpaid. The PMSC collapse threatens to drive more than a couple marginal publishers who were hooked up with them out of business. Among those *not* distributed by PMSC are Fantagraphics Books, Warp/Apple, and First... The editor at the revived Archie Comics Adventure line promises that the company will pay rates and give deals comparable to those from Marvel and DC. According to the word given one freelancer, Archie has a two stage plan: 1) revive and update

NO WAP! IN OCTOBER

It had to happen, and it did. Other considerations, mostly work, have hit all of us who put together *WAP!* at the same time. The only solution we have is to skip a month in our schedule, but we hope we've made up for it a little bit by coming out with an extra long issue this time. Sorry for any inconvenience this might cause. Thanks for your support, and thanks for allowing us this breather so we can get some *paying* work done.

The deadline for articles and cartoons for *WAP!* #7 is November 4.

The deadline for articles and cartoons for *WAP!* #8 is December 6.

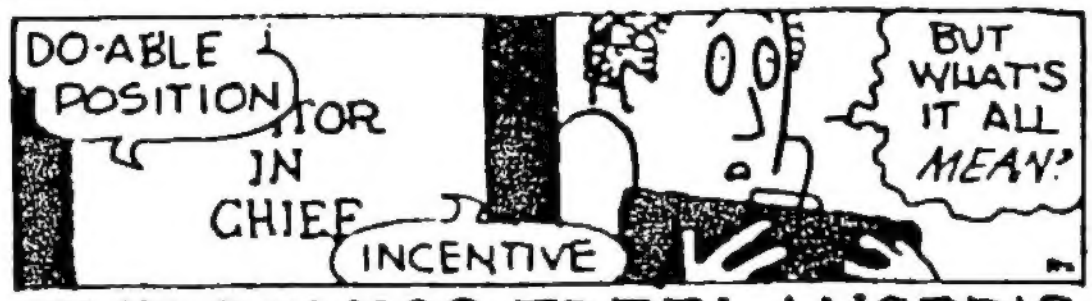
WAP! #7 COMING WITHOUT FAIL IN NOVEMBER

their old characters, and 2) publish new properties after stage 1 succeeds... There's a new DC policy that work on every new project halts after the first issue is lettered, so that management can examine the result to make sure it's up to snuff before they decide if the company really wants to publish it. Until then, work on subsequent issues can't be authorized. This doesn't strike us as a necessarily bad idea, but we can envision all kinds of scheduling horrors when the go-aheads finally come down, and we hope DC works to avoid that...

So who's buying Marvel? Latest word had New World Pictures sorting through more than 100 offers. Current lead contender is Hanna-Barbera, who have an independent L.A. lawyer putting together an investor package for them, with the lawyer dropping $5,000,000 of his own money into the deal. Word is H-B plans to think of Marvel as an investment, and keep their hands off management. Kicking them up the pecking order is the rumor that they're willing to buy Marvel's animation studio as well, though New World no longer insists on that as part of the deal...

Assignments: Len Wein scripting *JUSTICE MACHINE* for Comico. Dan Mishkin to write *ADVANCED DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS* for DC. Mark Evanier to write *NEW GODS*. Eric Larsen pencilling *THE PUNISHER*...

A spate of reports with a similar plot and theme have come to us lately. Freelancers who have meetings with editors and who elect to bring up business points have been asked, on several occasions, "You've been reading *WAP!*, haven't you?" Like freelancers couldn't have thought of business considerations on their own, right? It's getting to the point where editors have been doing all our promotional work for us... Remember that freelancers who haven't seen *WAP!* can get a free two-issue sample subscription just by sending their name and address to *WAP!, 1879 East Orange Grove, Pasadena, CA 91104*. Others can get a sample by sending a check for $2.50...



THE COMICS FREELANCER'S LEXICON

As comics have grown into a big-money industry, and companies battle for a lock on the market, there has been an epidemic of jargon from editors, publishers, and their employees. The Comics Freelancers Lexicon is a continuing WAP! feature, for the freelancer who wants to know what an editor or publisher is actually saying when he speaks. We welcome additions from one and all...

GRATUITOUS (gra-*too*-i-tus) *adj.*: might affect distribution. "We don't want any gratuitous sex or violence in our books. Look what happened with Friendly Frank's."

MISCOMMUNICATION (mis-ko-myoo-ni-*kay*-shun) n.: 1. Omission of information. "Oh, I didn't tell you that? Let's chalk it up to miscommunication." 2. Communication. "Are you sure I said that? I think there's been a miscommunication."

ON HIATUS (on hi-*ay*-tus) *phrase*: cancelled. "*Starslayer* is on hiatus."

PAYING DUES (pae-ying *dooz*) *phrase*: 1. Hanging around the office waiting for work. 2. Paying proper obeisance to editors. 3. Suffering through everything your editor suffered through before *they* originally got work. "There's nothing wrong with your work, but you haven't paid your dues yet." (Note: rarely applicable to pencillers.)

TRIBUTE (*trib*-yoot) n.: acknowledged imitation of a creator without compensation to that creator. Related to HOMAGE. "This book is going to be a tribute to Jack Kirby."

VERYSPECIAL (*ver*-ee-spesh-*al*) adj.: see SPECIAL (*WAP! #3*)

WORTH (*wurth*) adj.: relative commercial value of a given creator at a given moment to a given publisher. "As soon as we made them stars, they left us. Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons made more out of *WATCHMEN* than they were worth."

Some Random Thoughts on Self-Publishing

A major comics writer recently stated, when asked about self-publishing, that comics is the only field where publishing your own work isn't called vanity press. It's clear that this writer's perspective is that of the New York publishing world (and technically erroneous, as vanity press is paying *someone else* to publish your work). As major book publishers have focused increasingly on "commercial" books and "best sellers," many writers working outside the "commercial" fields have published their own works, or have joined with other writers in publishing cooperatives (a maneuver that has yet to be explored in the comics field). Poets have used similar strategies for decades. With rare exceptions, this is not the road to fame and glamor, but it has provided many writers with autonomy, creative freedom, and some income from their work.

Bookstore chains never see most of these books, unless they're picked up and reprinted by "mainstream" publishers, but self-published and cooperatively published books can be found on the shelves of most independent bookstores. Very effective distribution systems, operations as lean as the publishing operations, have arisen to handle them.

None of this sprang up overnight, and few of the people involved have become millionaires. But they have proved that an audience does exist even for the most esoteric reading matter, and wherever an audience exists, someone will inevitably step in to service its needs.

•••

Self-publishing is the province of the writer-artist, whether that involves one person or two. If two people are involved, their proximity -- in thought if not in distance -- breaks down the traditional divisions of labor that are regimentalized in the major (and many of the secondary?) companies. This involves a uniformity of intent and restriction of ego uncommon to comics today, where stardom seems to be the motivating goal of many people entering the field. Self-publishers have become stars, but anyone lusting after celebrity should probably go to Marvel or DC, where wide exposure is assured.

As yet, an independent distribution system for self-published comics doesn't exist. Mainstream distribution is virtually inaccessible to the self-publisher. The direct market distributors are more accessible, but self-published works can't compete with the massive Marvel and DC product lines for the distributor's attention and promotional effort. This is a problem that must be solved.

To a great extent, these conditions will only be mitigated by increasing numbers of financially successful self-published projects, which will increase public attention and distributor interest. But as much as the advent of independent publishers widened the potential of the medium, self-publishing threatens to be a fundamental and revolutionary change in comics, a return in sympathy (rather than content and style, though those options certainly remain open) to the underground comics of the 1960s.

The longest lasting self-published comics – *Elfquest*, *Cerebus*, etc. -- didn't erupt on the scene as instant successes, but started with small circulations and dedicated grassroots followings. They appealed to a core audience that was not being addressed by other comics. Occasionally a self-published work will become an "overnight" success, but the "grassroots growth" model remains the likeliest possibility.

•••

A word about commerciality:

No one knows in advance what will or won't be commercial. They only know what they've been able to sell in the past. In most cases, publishers who imitate a popular product (whether their own or someone else's) in hopes of cashing in on a market capture the corpse but rarely the animating spirit. This is true in all publishing, as well as in movies and television. Whatever appeals to a wide audience is commercial, but the factors which determine that appeal remain beyond the control of publishers, and of artists and writers. So anything you create runs the risk of being commercial, whether you intended it or not.

•••

Anyone involved in self-publishing today is a pioneer, and, despite the rosy picture painted in this issue of *WAP!*, the odds for financial failure far outweigh the odds for financial success. (By success, we mean being able to pay the rent and buy groceries, not starting a stock portfolio; if there hasn't been a huge rush by major industry talents to self-publishing, it's because most adults aren't crazy about face-offs with spouses and bill and tax collectors). But financial success or failure does not necessarily reflect on creative success or failure. Self-publishing still offers the widest possibilities for unfettered self-expression, but it also entails the greatest risks. Working for most publishers favors marketing; ideally, self-publishing favors art.

WAP! (Words And Pictures) is published twelve times a year by RFH Publications, at 1879 East Orange Grove Blvd., Pasadena CA 91104. All contents © 1988 RFH Publications, except where otherwise indicated. WAP! logo © 1988 Bill Sienkiewicz. Subscriptions: $25.00/year (12 issues) for freelance professionals, $45.00/year (12 issues) for the general public, and $95.00/year (12 issues) for full-time employees and executives of publishing companies. All rights reserved. Reproduction without permission is strictly prohibited.